

JOHNNIE

BY

E.O. LAUGHLIN



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JOHNNIE







JOHNNIE

A MEMORY OF BOYHOOD

BY

E. O. LAUGHLIN

ILLUSTRATED BY
WILL VAWTER



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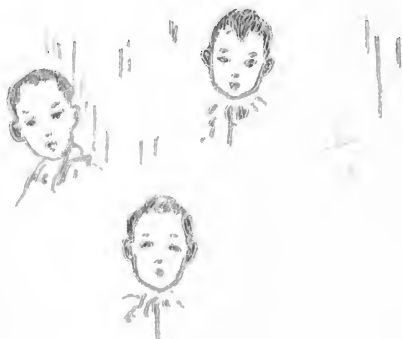
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DEDICATED TO

JOHNNIE

**Whose surname may be supplied by the reader
from the throng of other Johnnies,—just such
happy-hearted little youngsters as was this one.**



THE matter presented in this little volume has assumed its present form and dress with those mingled feelings of bravado and timidity which afflict the boy when first he appears in long trousers. The distress of such a boy becomes more evident the more it is concealed. He is painfully conscious of being mostly arms and legs—and clothes. If he swings along carelessly, he is afraid people will accuse him of putting on; if he adopts a stiff and dignified manner, as best suits his attire, he thinks that he is awkward; and, in any case, he is likely to be overtaken at last by the comfortless conviction that people are not noticing him at all. With these emotions, and others, the author makes his bow.

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“O wonderland of wayward childhood! what
An easy, breezy realm of summer calm
And dreamy gleam and gloom and bloom and balm
Thou art!—The Lotus-Land the poet sung—
It is the Child-World, when the heart beats young.

—RILEY.



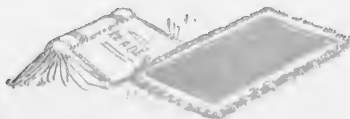
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I

HIS FIRST APPEARANCE

It was in the morning of the first day of school. The boys had collected in the far corner of the yard, where they were industriously taking turns at wrestling with the New Boy with the intent of determining once for all his proper place in the social scale of the district. The girls, in blue-checked and red-plaid pinafores, were grouped upon the stile, their arms sweetly encircling one another's waists, while they made scornful remarks about the New Girl, a shy, frail midget in drooping black sunbonnet, who stood sadly apart grasping a battered dinner-pail, her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Well, here comes another!" exclaimed one of the larger girls, glancing up the road. "Who can it be? I thought everybody was here."



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No one was actually in sight as yet; but far up the road there approached a revolving, pyramidal pillar of dust, such as only a schoolboy or a runaway horse can produce. On it came, swaying and wavering like a miniature whirlwind; and the girls went gingerly out to meet it. As it drew near, the wraith of a round, smiling face could be discerned, a faint nucleus floating in the midst of the yellow nimbus. Then a dust-covered waist was revealed below the face, and, finally, two tiny twinkling feet. The nucleus suddenly halted opposite the school-house, and, as the dust dissolved and drifted away, a fixed and mask-like grin took the place of the smile. It was another new scholar, and the girls immediately gathered about him with the curiosity of fawns and women.

"I believe it's Mrs. Winkle's little boy," observed one. "What is your name, dear?"

"Jawnnie Winkle, 'n I'm six years old," he recited promptly with automatic solemnity, putting on the grinning mask again with a smirk as soon as he finished. His mother had drilled him all morning upon this phrase so that he might properly introduce himself to the teacher,

HIS FIRST APPEARANCE

and he had repeated it with every step as he came careening down the road. The bevy of girls pressed closer, and one bent over and tried to kiss him. Without changing his expression he ducked and dodged through the phalanx of skirts with the celerity of a weasel. Stopping at some distance he suddenly thrust his hand into his pocket and brought forth a panting, half-dead toad.

"Say, this'll make warts!" he exclaimed with dilating eyes.

"Why Johnnie Winkle!" cried the girls in dismay. "Throw that nasty thing away! You ought to be ashamed!"

"I don't keer," he laughed, "I like 'em, an' I'm goin' to have warts on both hands an' on my toes, too," and sitting down in the middle of the road he proceeded to rub the batrachian over his feet. Then there came a jangle of bells and a pell-mell rush for the schoolroom. When, a few moments later, the teacher looked up in the full glow of her new-found dignity, all her subjects had preëmpted their claims. Every back seat had from two to four occupants, and the foreground contained only Johnnie and the New

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Girl, who in their innocence had taken a seat side by side directly under her nose.

It was Johnnie's first appearance—his initial journey out into the world. Heretofore all his wisdom had been drawn from his mother's lips, and his naughtiness spun from his own little heart; but now a new era had arrived, and henceforth he was to learn wisdom and wickedness by contact with the world. It was with such regretful reflections that his mother had started him schoolward that morning and then gone sobbing into the house.

It was with the shade of a similar thought, too, that the teacher looked down into the depths of his blue eyes as he grinned shyly up at her; but Johnnie himself was oppressed by no dismal forebodings. His mind was completely occupied with the novelties and wonders about him. His name and age were soon successfully imparted to the teacher, and, this having been impressed upon him as the chief duty to be performed, he felt himself free to look about. The huge blackboards and gaily colored maps on the wall, the queer seat he occupied, the teacher, the pupils, the droning stillness, the cracks in





HIS FIRST APPEARANCE

the floor, the toad in his pocket, all drew his attention by turns.

Gradually the steady monotony of school life completely possessed him, and the day grew long and drowsy. Little twinges of homesickness contorted his features toward evening, but he was brave, and would have held out firmly except for an untoward circumstance. The toad, which he had secretly cherished in his pocket all day, died, and at recess an older boy informed him gravely that this disaster would cause his father's cows to give bloody milk. Such a distressing calamity was too much for his already tremulous emotions, and he broke down. Kind words on the part of the big girls were unavailing; even the gentle teacher could not comfort him.

"I want to go-o-o home!" he sobbed, and home he went.

Long and weary was the way. The very dust seemed heavy and cheerless, and he would have cried all the way but that he was alone. The most lavish boy will not waste many tears on the desert air. Once he thought he saw a snake, and after that he imagined it was trailing close

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at his heels, thus adding a new terror to his burden. As he came by the pasture he noticed the cows calmly munching grass, apparently unmindful of the dire spell upon them, and the tears started afresh as he thought of their blameless innocence and his own guilt. He said nothing about the true cause of his perturbation at home, but after milking-time examined the crocks with stealthy care. No blood could be detected, yet his faith in the potency of the murdered toad was unshaken. The *bona-fide* appearance of several warts on his hands within the week had demonstrated the power of the living creature beyond peradventure.

The melancholy and somewhat unheroic ending of his first day at school made Johnnie resolve never to go again. But he was forcefully persuaded to reconsider the matter next morning, and he set out once more with a bold heart.

Thereafter he speedily developed into a genuine schoolboy—a species of urchin distinctively and everlastingly differing from the home-boy. That he acquired knowledge can not be denied, but that he made any conscious effort to do so is extremely doubtful. The average small boy

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in school spends one-fifth of his time looking out of the window, one-fourth in dreaming, and one-half in miscellaneous mischief. The remainder is devoted to his studies.

As time went on, Johnnie, being a boy of some native originality, dreamed all sorts of things and invented several new forms of mischief. One of his favorite ways of amusing himself was to borrow a tremendous "jogaphy" from one of the older girls and study its illustrations, or make imaginary journeys across the maps, which he vaguely knew represented the big world outdoors. As he became better versed in geographical matters, he learned that England was a red country, that Germany was blue, and that Italy was boot-shaped and green. He discovered yellow and purple and beautiful pink countries, also, here and there, and pictured their marvelous radiance to himself by the hour. When the contemplation of these wonders grew tiresome the huge book made a splendid screen behind which he could retire to indulge in other pleasant diversions.

Johnnie made remarkable progress in the art of reading. Within a few weeks he could read

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quite as well off the book as on. After noting the pictorial part of the lesson for an instant, he would look toward the ceiling and chant, "The—cat is—on the—mat;" or, fixing his eyes on the teacher, exclaim emphatically, "I see a fat hen!"

Spelling was a particularly delightful vocal exercise to him, and he would wriggle and squirm and twist his fingers ecstatically as he sang, "Sa-ty, cat; ba-ty, bat; ra-ty, rat; ta-ty, tat; za-ty, zat"—and he could have gone still farther if the alphabet had held out.

Penmanship he found more difficult. The arbitrary way in which pot-hooks had to be made perplexed him; and in following the elusive copy it was necessary for him to call into play every muscle in his body, contorting his toes and twisting his tongue convulsively with each right or left curve.

In the main, school life was running smoothly enough for Johnnie; but, alas, he had yet to experience his first fight, his first flogging, and his first love affair.





II

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

JOHNNIE, being a very important member of a small family, was somewhat spoiled. A few days at school sufficed to reveal a certain unseemly air of pride and superiority about him. This was evinced more especially in his manners and general appearance. Instead of the blue "hickory" shirt and jeans trousers of his mates, he wore a starched cambric waist and cloth knickerbockers. His face was clean and his hair combed each morning. Moreover, now and then he used strange, grammatical forms of speech. Once he said, "I saw a bird's nest." Whereupon he was greeted by the jeering inquiry, "Did ye saw it clean in two?" Ah, woe-fully out of place is boyish aristocracy in the democratic public school!

His peculiarities came more and more into notice as time passed, and the other boys took to calling him "girly." They also made faces

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at him and thumped him and wallowed him in the dirt for his pride's sake. Being by nature non-combatant, Johnnie put up with this contemptuously in meekness for some time, answering jeers with grins and spiteful words with silent tears; but there came a day when forbearance was exhausted.

Jimmy Jenks proved to be the last straw. Jimmy was a little wisp of impudence and viciousness of Johnnie's own age, but belonging to the opposite extreme of Boydom. He had the cheeks of a pig, the beady eyes of a rat, and a suggestively simian head mounted by a shock of bristling red hair. To these conglomerate features, his mental and moral attributes corresponded to a nicety. One recess he made his first and last attack on Johnnie. Johnnie was in the best of humors as he approached the group of boys behind the school building and breathlessly began to introduce what he expected would be a delightful bit of information with,

"Say!"

"Aw, say 't yourself, ye've got yer mouth open," drawled Jimmy, stepping forward.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Johnnie's mouth immediately closed droopingly.

"Ye're a purty feller," continued Jimmy, still advancing, "an' ye darsn't take it up!"

Johnnie backed away, and the whole crowd began hooting him and urging his adversary on.

"Cowardy! Cowardy-calf!" they cried; and, "That's right, Reddy; give it to him!"

"I double dare ye," exclaimed Jimmy scornfully, "an' if ye'll take a double dare, ye'll steal a hog an' eat the hair!"

Johnnie was growing pale and restless. He dug his toes into the ground and clenched his hands. Jimmy leaned forward and valiantly tapped him on the cheek. Then Johnnie fled. Jimmy was at his heels, and a hilarious yell went up from the other boys as they joined in the chase. Suddenly they brought up at the back fence, and Johnnie was compelled to face his foe. Further retreat was impossible.

"Look out now, Reddy; I'm goin' to fight," warned Johnnie; and fight he did. There was not much science in the battle, but there was a





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great deal of fury. All the gibes and slights and snubs of many days welled up in Johnnie's breast, and made a hero of him. Jimmy was thrown to the ground, was chugged, was pinched and slapped, and finally sat upon in the region of the stomach and churned.

"Now, I guess you'll behave yourself," observed Johnnie, pausing astride his victim. Then came the teacher.

"Boys! Boys!" she cried; and the battle was ended.

"He called me names!" whined Jimmy, when the trouble was under investigation behind closed doors that evening.

"What did he call you, James?" asked the teacher.

"Why, he—he cussed, an' called me R-r-red-dy."

"Johnnie, what have you to say to this?"

"Nothin'."

"You may step this way, Johnnie," came the stern command.

The boy outside at the key-hole clapped his hands softly as he whispered to his mates:



TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

"By hoky, Girly's game! He ain't even whimpered."

Whack, whack, whack, went the whip within. Then there was a lull, but no sound of sobs could be heard.


"Now it's Reddy's turn," said the boy expectantly.

"O teacher, O—boo-hoo—I couldn't help it—he pitched onto me,—Oh, my back's awful sore, an' I got biles on my legs. Oh, please, please don't, teacher,—"

Thus wailed Jimmy, and the boy at the key-hole danced gleefully until pushed aside by a companion, when he rolled on the grass and hugged himself and kicked up his heels.

Johnnie Winkle was straightway placed upon a pedestal by his admiring schoolmates, and the porcine Jimmy became his high priest. But there was a sorrowful sequel to the flogging. Johnnie's mother had often assured him that if he ever got a whipping at school he would get another at home. This threat caused him to be very reticent about the affair, and his silence might have saved him had not his cousin, Elmira

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Mulkins, gone home with him on Friday night. She was a girl of confiding ways. She confidentially told Johnnie on the way home that she would say nothing about his trouble, and then confidentially informed Mrs. Winkle of the whole affair. A double punishment was the result. The long-suffering Johnnie was whipped for getting whipped at school, and sent to bed supperless for not telling about it. And it all happened because he had resented an unprovoked insult.

A boy's sense of justice is very keen. When punished for downright remissness he accepts it as a matter of course, but one single lick amiss puts him out of joint with the entire system of domestic government—legislative, judicial, and executive. Johnnie's state of mind, as he limped off to bed, was desperate. So rebellious was his mood that he deliberately omitted saying his prayers, and went to bed without washing his feet. He kicked all the covers off the bed, and had a notion to die. There was some consolation in picturing his mother's grief and the distress of his teacher when he should be discovered next morning, beaten and starved and frozen to

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death. But so overwrought was his childish imagination that he soon passed from the mere conception to the absolute conviction of impending dissolution. Then he became frightened. Bouncing out of bed, he repeated his "Now I lay me down to sleep" anxiously on penitent knees. This solemn duty having been performed, he felt more calm, and once more took up the thread of vengeful thoughts.

Probably his wounded spirit would take its upward flight about midnight, when the house was still and all were sleeping; but in case it did not, in case he should open his eyes on the cruel world again to-morrow, he resolved to run away. It had come to this. There was no use in trying to be a good boy in a community where the wicked were pardoned, while the upright were trodden in the dust. He searched through his meager knowledge of geography for a region that would suit him, and finally hit upon Ethiopia. He would take a box of shoe polish along, and, blacking his face, become a fierce little cannibal boy and a heathen, and if missionaries from dark America came fooling around he would help eat them.

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With this soothing reflection he fell asleep. He was still alive next morning, and so very hungry that he decided to take breakfast once more with his obdurate parents.

But he remained silent and sullen, and slipped the shoe polish into his pocket ominously at the first opportunity. Before going, however, he concluded to give cousin Elmira a crushing farewell.

"You'll be sorry for what you done 'fore long, Smarty," he began reproachfully as soon as he found her alone.

"Now, Johnnie," replied the girl tearfully, "I didn't mean to—to—"

"Yes, you did. D'ye see that?" and he produced the box of blacking. "That's to black my face with when I git to be a wild cannibal," and he tried to look terrible.

"Oh, Johnnie Winkle!"

"Yes—I'm goin' to run off," he went on desperately. "I'm goin' to Ethiopia an' kill an' eat people up; an' you caused it all, too," he added, choking as the pathos of the situation overcame him; "an' you're a mean thing!"

"Johnnie Winkle, I'll tell your ma!"

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"Yes, you're nothin' but a reg'lar tattletale, dog-gone it!"

"Oh-h, an' I'll tell her you swore!"

This dreadful slip of profanity turned the tide. In order to persuade Elmira not to tell of it, Johnnie was forced to promise—"hope to die"—that he would not run away—this time, at least. Moreover he consented to do penance by playing house with her, and was kind and gentle all day long.





III

BOYISH DREAMS

CHILDHOOD is strikingly a time of action, and yet essentially a season of dreams. The boy's brain is as nimble and restless as his body. He is always thinking, thinking; and the number of facts at his command is so limited that he is constantly compelled to resort to fancies for mental aliment. The seven-year-old's store of absolute knowledge is very lean. "The earth is round like a ball or an orange. It rotates on its axis and has a pole at each end." He has seen axes and poles; and here his imagination steps in and draws the mental picture of a huge yellow orange, with a telegraph pole protruding from each end and resting on a pile of polished axes.

Whichever way he turns it is the same. A few inconsistent and distorted facts are given him, out of which fancy proceeds to weave a queer fabric of consistent but erroneous conceptions.

BOYISH DREAMS

Day after day he puts the one great unanswerable query, "Why?" He asks it of himself, of the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air; he inquires of his omniscient parents; and the replies he receives—what are they? The seasons change, the squirrels go on sorting the good nuts from the bad, the birds build their nests and sing and fly away, and his father says, "Never mind!"

Perhaps the real knowledge of his elders is not so far in excess of his own; but men have become accustomed to their own ignorance, they have accepted the immutable relationship of things, have separated the natural from the supernatural, and attained poise. They have learned to crawl and abandoned all hope of flying. But to the boy all things are strange and contradictory. To him the probable, the possible, and the impossible are confusingly alike and confoundingly different.

Out of his heterogeneous stock of fact and fancy he compiles a philosophy all his own; and there are few things, indeed, in heaven and earth of which his philosophy never dreams.



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No two children have quite the same code, or see the same visions; but they are dreamers, all.

Johnnie Winkle's mental vagaries were boundless. He was always wondering and wishing. On the way to school he saw a hawk so high in the air that it seemed a mere gray speck against the azure. He sat down at the roadside and followed it with envious eyes. He wished he could fly, and wondered why he could not. Why should a vicious bird of prey be permitted to soar among the clouds, while a nice little boy, who attended Sunday-school regularly and obeyed his parents, had to trudge along in the dust? If boys could not learn to fly, why was he a boy? Why wasn't the hawk a boy, and the boy a hawk? How pleasant to be a baby-hawk, with nothing to do from day to day but lounge about in a downy nest and eat worms and grow feathers! And to know that some day you could go sailing away, away, oh, everywhere! Sometimes it was a squirrel that he envied, sometimes a mouse. The happy lot of the little fledgling chicken he particularly coveted. How inexpressibly cozy it must be at bed-time to







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creep under the hen-mamma's soft wing, and chirp one's self to sleep!

Having formulated the wish, the fairy wand of fancy would often come to his aid with magic make-believes. Flapping his arms, he would give a glad cry and go soaring down the road, with bird-like grace and lightness, finally to perch on the school-yard fence and plume his wings and sing. Now and then he would come to school in the guise of a horse or a cow. He was frequently transformed into a fox or a rabbit, and sometimes he impersonated a whole pack of hounds. On occasions he even became an engine and train of cars, puffing and whistling laboriously.

Johnnie was a dreamer, with plenty of time and material for dreams; but his imaginings were not always of this idle and extravagant nature. Slowly, as the days passed, there sprouted odd little germs of sentiment within his breast. From the first day at school he had formed childish prejudices for and against certain of his mates; but now he began to feel a strange awkward attachment for a particular

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big girl, which was more than a mere liking. She was a large, luminous miss of about twice Johnnie's age. Her name was Alice Jones, a remarkably sweet name he thought. It was she who had startled him by an attempt to kiss him on the morning of his first appearance, and he was more frightened than ever now when he looked back at the occurrence. It seemed to Johnnie that if she should ever actually kiss him, he would surely collapse with embarrassment and rapture.

He fell to dreaming largely of Alice, and would sit and stare at her in school time long and worshipfully. Whenever his eyes chanced to meet hers, however, he would wince and blush guiltily, turning it off as best he could by smiling stupidly at the New Girl who sat near Alice, and whom he really detested.

In this way Johnnie went on for weeks. At length the conviction became fixed that he ought to declare his passion in some way; and instinct and observation alike pointed to writing her a note as the easiest and safest plan. It was a weighty and laborious matter; and he consumed

BOYISH DREAMS

much time and paper before he was able to produce a satisfactory declaration. It ran thus:

Dear allie sum loves 1 and sum loves 2, But I love 1 and that is you. Yours truly, J. W.

He folded it carefully, and stowed it away in his pocket to await the time when courage and opportunity should be ripe for its delivery. But Johnnie's pocket was a precarious place for a note. The constant friction of pebbles, and nails, and pencils, and chalk made it age rapidly, and when at last it was fondly deposited between the pages of Alice's geography, borrowed for the purpose, it looked more like an ancient bit of papyrus than a modern love tale. It was no wonder, under these conditions, that the fair Alice failed to grasp its import and thoughtlessly tossed it to the floor. Johnnie saw her do it, and his heart sank. He winked and glared at her, and pointed to the note until he perspired, but she only smiled cheerily back at him. He resorted to all manner of pantomime to no avail, and finally in utter desperation attempted to creep across the floor and rescue it while the teacher's back was turned.



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"Johnnie Winkle," cried the teacher sharply, before he was half across, "come here! Now you may explain what you were doing on the floor."

"Lookin' for my—my pencil," he gasped in terror.

"Has any one seen Johnnie's pencil?" she asked, turning to the school.

"It's here, on his desk," piped the boy who sat behind him.

Johnnie registered a vow to thrash that boy.

"You may take your seat and remain after school," said the teacher.

In the meantime the New Girl had discovered the ill-fated note, and was deciphering its contents with pleasant thrills. But her name was not "allie," and as she read it again, it dawned upon her that it had been intended for other eyes. Then her heart closed like a clam. Placing the grimy bit of paper in her spelling book, she approached the teacher's desk and, after a feint of asking how to pronounce a certain word, slipped the note into the teacher's hand.

"That's what he was hunting," she whispered scornfully.

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Johnnie observed that the note was gone, but dared not guess its fate. Perhaps Alice had found it after all, and hugging this hope and fear he awaited developments.

As the other scholars filed out he looked with furtive anxiety toward the teacher, and was reassured to note a mild twinkle in her eyes. Possibly his punishment was not to be so very severe. At length she came and sat down at his side. Producing a scrap of paper, "I wish you would write your initials for me, Johnnie," she said kindly. That was easy enough; but since she was so good he would take great pains. He ran his tongue out and proceeded slowly, scrupulously—with as great care as when inditing the note to Alice.

"That is excellent," said the teacher approvingly. "It looks very much like this, too, does it not?" and she thrust the dreadful note under his nose. It was terrible. Johnnie could not stir—could not lift his eyes from the accusing missive—could not even clear his throat. His entire vitality seemed to have been diverted into blushes.

"Did you write it, Johnnie?"

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It would be gratifying to be able to state that he replied bravely in the affirmative. But Johnnie was not a model; he was just a boy, and he answered sheepishly but resolutely, "No'm." And the teacher, rightly guessing that his conscience would visit sufficient retribution upon him, let him go.





IV

AS FATHER OF THE MAN

PERHAPS the one theme which furnished Johnnie the broadest field for speculation, and supplied the tissue of his richest dreams, was what he would do when he became a man. At different stages of his boyhood he aspired to almost every craft and calling, and resolved to accomplish all sorts of things from murder to missionary work. Few of his intentions for the future were at all fixed. Most of them depended upon some particular mood, and were subject to daily revision. There was but one thing that he was steadfastly sure he did not want to be, and that was—a boy.

Among his earliest and most revered heroes, whose example he longed to emulate, was the threshing-machine man. This man was jolly and wise, was always saying things at which people laughed, and knew all about the wonderful thresher, inside and out. Moreover, he was

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“boss,” and only worked when he liked. Johnnie watched him worshipfully whenever the machine came upon the Winkle place. At the wave of his brawny hand every wheel started, and stopped. If anything went wrong he knew exactly how to adjust it. He would even crawl calmly under or inside of the monster machine sometimes, and this was a feat to be admired and envied indeed. Then, when the threshing was under way—when the vibrating riddles kept time to the whirling cylinder’s eery song, till the very ground quaked and trembled with awe—how airily he would grasp a huge oil can and go climbing here and there amongst the maze of moving belts and pulleys, and no one dared tell him not to do it. For days after his departure Johnnie nursed the one ambition to become a famous threshing-machine man.

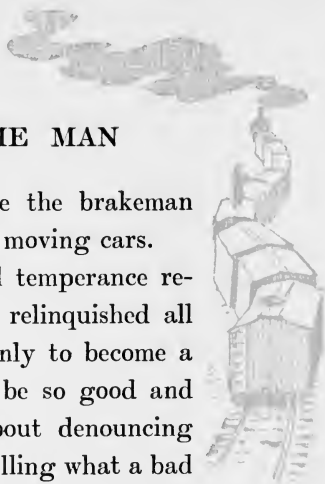
But when he grew somewhat acquainted with the lot of the locomotive engineer his desires took a decided turn in that direction, and he began to dream of the delights of driving an engine across the country, with nothing to do but to ride and blow the whistle. What an endless holiday such a life must be! Still, he would like

AS FATHER OF THE MAN

to be a brakeman, too, because the brakeman could run along the tops of the moving cars.

Once there came a wonderful temperance revival, and Johnnie straightway relinquished all other aspirations, and wished only to become a reformed drunkard. It would be so good and grand to be able to travel about denouncing rum, preaching salvation, and telling what a bad man he had once been. To stand before charmed audiences and wave one's hands and call everybody sisters and brothers, to provoke smiles and tears at will, to pour alcohol over eggs and show how it cooked them, to repeat the story of the man adrift on the raging river, and describe the terrible plunge over the falls—ah! it would be glorious! Johnnie practised temperance oratory secretly in the barn at every opportunity, and preached to the horses and cows until they presented plain evidence of being under conviction.

But the fact that he had never actually been a drunkard was against him, and finally caused him to abandon the field. The advent of a circus doubtless helped to precipitate this step. Although his parents were scrupulously opposed



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to "shows," this one was so lavishly magnificent in its advertisements that they resolved to make an exception in its favor, compromising with their consciences by arguing that it was really the instructive menagerie which they wished to see. So they went early and stayed through concert and all. They would not have entered the circus tent at all, but that the elephants were going to perform there, and they could not afford to miss the edifying sight of an elephant standing on its head. Mrs. Winkle was pained by many things she saw at the performance, especially the profound interest in every act manifested by Johnnie and Mr. Winkle.

Johnnie walked and lived in a dream of prancing horses, of trapeze and tights, for weeks. He fully determined to be a showman, and practised faithfully to that end. He came near breaking his neck in an attempt to execute a double somersault in the hay-mow by making a mathematical mistake and carelessly turning over just once and a half instead of twice. He constructed a trapeze out of halter ropes and a pitchfork handle, from which he dangled in daring poses. He painted his face with poke-



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berries and surreptitiously borrowed his mother's hat in order to play clown, and practised standing on his head till he nearly wore his hair off. But the lack of proper trappings was a constant source of embarrassment. His failure to accomplish certain feats he believed to be due solely to this dearth of tights and trunks. So he went about constructing an outfit. From the dark depths of the garret he unearthed certain gauzy remnants, out of which, with scissors, needle, and thread he pieced together a strange and wonderful garment. When finished, it presented an undue fullness here and there, and occasional holes, which he had neglected to mend, but the warm weather rendered them of no consequence.

It seemed an auspicious day for him to appear. His mother had company. Aunt Mary and Cousin Elmira had come to spend the day, and shortly after them the minister and his wife. The latter couple had probably never seen an acrobatic performance, and Johnnie thought how pleased they would be, and how proud his mother ought to be, when he should present himself. It chanced that the subject of circuses



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was under discussion. The minister had mildly rebuked Sister Winkle for her recent worldliness, and she was feebly protesting.

“Now, Brother Potter, I don’t believe it hurt a thing for us to go just that one time. The animals were real instructive, an’ while I didn’t approve of the performance, I don’t think it harmed us a mite. Now, there’s Johnnie—” and even as she spoke, there Johnnie really was. A sleeveless shirt with extremely low neck, a green veil for trunks, and a nameless nether garment of gauze and striped hosiery, constituted his costume. He smiled and bowed gracefully as he came into view upon the lawn. Then he began jauntily with a succession of hand-springs. Mrs. Winkle was stricken dumb.

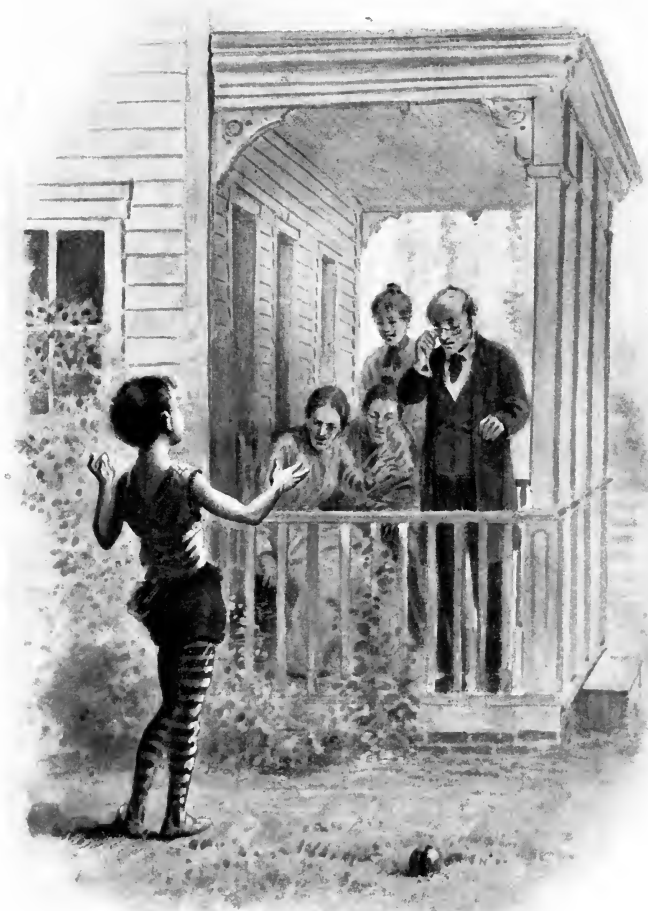
“Very instructive,” murmured the minister, while his wife looked pained, and Aunt Mary tittered.

Johnnie stood on his head, waving his feet.

“My! But that’s splendid!” cried Elmira, clapping her hands.

Suddenly the air was rent with a sound of tearing. Then Mrs. Winkle found her tongue.

“You, Johnnie!” she screamed. “You, John-





AS FATHER OF THE MAN

nie!" and Johnnie retired in hasty disorder. But punishment was visited upon him before he had time to put on more substantial clothes, and its severity was such that he never donned tights again.

There were many wrongs which Johnnie expected to avenge when he should become a man. A certain big boy who was always bullying him was to be so thoroughly thrashed that he would weep and beg for mercy. Cousin Elmira was to suffer for her tattling, and even his parents were to be made to realize the injustice of their acts. Yet a due amount of reflection upon this subject tended to soften his asperity, and he always decided it were better to be generous than merely just.

He would do a great many nice things. Those who were becomingly meek and penitent he would magnanimously discharge with the injunction to "go, and sin no more." And if he ever had any little boys of his own, how beautifully he would treat them. This was one of his favorite topics for speculation. His little boys should go to school only when they pleased; they should not have to do chores; they should

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have pie for breakfast—as many pieces as they wished; they should have hip pockets and wear suspenders, and go to all the circuses, and have ponies and lots of dogs, and a little train of cars to run by steam. Other little boys would come for miles around to see what a kind papa his boys had.

Thus would Johnnie dream and ponder until he fairly worshiped the ideal man that he intended to be. Truly the child is father of the man; but how degenerate a descendant he becomes when he has reached maturity!





THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

GOING to school was compulsory. That was the chief reason Johnnie disliked it. If his parents had held it out to him as a luxury, if they had spoken of it as an indulgence they could ill afford and tried to persuade him to be satisfied with picture-books at home, he would have gone or died. But it was continually presented to him in the light of a serious duty, and duties are always bugbears to boyhood. On general principles Johnnie disliked the things he ought to do, and the things he had to do he hated. Such has been the primitive perverseness of his kind since Adam's fall.

For weeks he had been looking longingly forward to vacation. There was nothing he desired so much as to be free once more. It seemed to him that when school closed, he would be the happiest boy in the world. He laid a hundred plans for the holidays, including in their scope

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every sort of diversion from fishing to chasing butterflies.

But when the last day of school really came, he did not rejoice as he had anticipated. All day long strange regrets kept rising in his throat and choking him, an unaccustomed sadness dimmed his eyes, and dark-browed melancholy came and sat at his side. The last day of school! The last day of baseball and black man, of hide-and-seek and Ant'ny Over, of Green Gravel, of Ring Around a Rosy—the last happy day of whispering, of smiling at girls and writing notes, of play, of joy, of companionship. To-morrow he would be at home and alone. To-morrow he would be disconsolate and altogether miserable. The last day. He wished—yes, he wished it were but the beginning of school again, with all the long, delightful months to follow!

He borrowed Alice's geography, and slowly, as he turned the leaves—for the last time, reviewed the events of the hallowed past. How many and how dear were the recollections that floated there between him and the book! Every blessed page was intimately connected with some irretrievable by-gone pleasure. And it was

THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

Alice's book. His affection for her, which had languished of late, came surging back resistlessly. It was her book; her name was on the fly-leaf, written beautifully. Her thumb-marks underscored each lesson; the faint, meadowy odor, exhaling from its pages—ah, futile incense to departed days—whispered of her! And this was the end of all. Doubtless other eyes would gaze on the book, other hands caress it, other hearts throb with the love of her, ere school opened again. With brimming eyes, which shamed him, Johnnie inscribed on the last page that soulful sentiment, sacred to all school-memories: "When this you see, remember me," and sealed it with a tear.

Nay, the love affairs of boyhood are not to be passed over in derision. Is not childhood a part, the very best part, of life? And its passions, though often transient, are they not intense and pure? He is hopelessly old to whom the sentiment of the young appears utterly inane.

On this last day of school Johnnie's heart softened toward the teacher also. He had regarded her always as a sort of natural enemy, whom it was his prerogative to oppose, and for whom

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anything more than a cold respect was weakness. Yet she was not such a bad teacher, after all; and he almost wept again with the thought of not seeing her any more. All the boys and girls seemed to assume more amiable outlines in the perspective of the past. Even the familiar furniture of the room took on a golden glamour, and his hardest lessons smiled up into his face in the guise of old friends.

The day was not all given to gloom, however. School was to close with a flourish. A program had been prepared, consisting of compositions, declamations and a grand finale of competitive spelling. Johnnie, himself, was to "say a piece," upon which his mother had been drilling him for weeks, and she was coming after dinner to hear him.

Among the throng of visitors came Alice's mother, too. Johnnie looked upon her with awe. To be the parent of his Dulcinea was to be great. Perhaps it was largely owing to her presence that Johnnie muddled his "speech." Another enervating circumstance may have been the fact that Alice immediately preceded him with a soul-stirring essay on "Love Thy Neighbor." At



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any rate, when Johnnie's name was announced a strange numbness came over him, his knees trembled, and his identity was lost. It was not really Johnnie who staggered to the rostrum and, in a sepulchral voice, murmured dolefully:

"Twinkle little—twinkle star,

How I wonder"—here he paused and tried to swallow the lump in his throat—

"How I wonder what you are,

Up above"—another gulp—"above the world so high,

How I wonder what you are,

When the golden grass is set,"—

Some one tittered, and, panic-stricken, Johnnie rushed on like a flock of frightened sheep:

"When—the—sky—with—dew—is—wet,—
Then—you—show—your—little—light, Twinkle—all—the—night"—gulp—"night."

He finished in a husky whisper and flew to his seat, where his temporarily departed spirit presently rejoined him. The remainder of the exercises he enjoyed very well, especially the New Girl's recital of Curfew and the Big Boy's interpretation of Antony on the Death of Cæsar.

The spelling-match came next, and here



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Johnnie shone. Spelling was his forte. He caught the words in mid air as the teacher gave them out and hurled them back confidently, almost defiantly. Now and then he made a feint of missing one, but he would always catch it on the first bounce if not on the fly and, tossing it up a time or two, would send it back unerringly. Some of the more difficult words he literally seemed to hold in his mouth and masticate a while, just to get the juice out of them, but they always came forth right.

When the teacher loaded her mortar with "daguerreotype" and fired, a hush fell on the room, and every one thought how heartless it was to aim such deadly artillery at so small a boy. But, ere the smoke had cleared away, Johnnie was seen to square himself and swell up proudly for the answering volley.

"D-a, da, g-u-e-r-r-e, gar, o, garo, t-y-p-e, type, daguerreotype," spelled Johnnie in measured tones.

"Right!" called the teacher, and the house roared with applause.

At length every scholar was spelled down, except Johnnie and Alice, and for half an hour the

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victory lay between them. The dictionary was drawn upon, and strange, unnatural words never before heard of, were pronounced. It was a tedious battle. Finally in despair, the teacher called incisively, "Caoutchouc!"

It was Alice's turn, and she misspelled the ghastly word miserably.

"Next," sighed the teacher, with an air of relief.

And Johnnie spelled it right.

It was certainly either a miracle or an accident, the people whispered. But, in fact, it was neither. Johnnie had come upon the word in the back of the geography one day, and its very formidableness had fascinated him into mastering it then and there. He was lionized by all, and it would have been a proud moment for him but for the lamentable fact that his gain had been Alice's loss. In the excitement of the contest he had hardly realized the personality of his opponent. He had been oblivious of everything except the words he was spelling. All unintentionally, he felt that he had done a very ungracious thing—had defeated and put to shame the girl he adored.

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"It's just the teacher's partiality," he heard Alice's mother whisper; "I don't believe he spelt it right at all. I doubt if they is such a word, anyway. The idea!"

And amid all the buzz of congratulations Johnnie was profoundly wretched.

But, at all odds, he had won the prize, and he hoped its possession might compensate him to some degree. He was called to the platform, where, with words of praise, such as she had never bestowed before, the teacher presented him a book. He thrust it into his pocket and started to his seat amid renewed applause. But his mother intercepted him.

"Johnnie Winkle," she whispered shrilly, "where are your manners? Go back and thank your teacher!"

Johnnie had not learned that inconsistent but imperative rule of custom, which requires an additional payment of thanks for honors already well earned.

"I'm much obliged," he admitted diffidently, facing about.

There was much curiosity expressed as to the

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book's probable contents and value, but Johnnie stubbornly refused to permit its inspection.

The actual breaking up of school was not so painful after all. Farewells were lightly spoken for the most part, and sighs and tears kept in abeyance by an assumption of gaiety. Regret at parting with a friend was largely assuaged by getting his tag.

When he arrived at home, Johnnie examined his prize book. It was a very small and somewhat rusty looking volume, across whose cover was emblazoned the melancholy title "Paradise Lost"!

"H'm—poetry," murmured Johnnie dejectedly, as he turned the pages. Before night the book had been given a place in the family bookcase, where it reposed undisturbed for many years.





VI

VACATIONS AND CHORES

JOHNNIE WINKLE's world was narrow. It consisted only of two or three square miles of farm land, bounded by an irregular horizon of timber, out of which the sun rose each morning, and into which it disappeared each night. Strange, unearthly shadows filled this sylvan border-land, and beyond lay mystery impenetrable. But the sky reached to a stupendous height, and was very blue above. Across this world, as the Milky Way girds the heavens, ran the country road, a wonderful, unknown path, leading out of space into space, and joining together a universe of a vastness and importance but dimly guessed.

It was a small world, but it was a busy and contented one, full of life and sunshine, and so abundant in production that its harvests continually overflowed into each other. To a sojourner from the city it might have presented a

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somewhat drowsy, humdrum appearance at times—its peace might have been mistaken for solitude, its quietude for dullness; but to its native inhabitants, who knew its under-life and the subtile, silent magic of the seasons, it was the best and most beauteous of worlds. For them it did not lack entertainment. The grand opera opened with frog choruses and closed with a rare solo by Madame Whippoorwill. Nature set fireflies aglow and hung out jack-o'-lanterns each Fourth of July; and the moon and stars occupied the firmament night after night. Flowers sprang up and bloomed of their own accord, and birds came and sang melodies of freedom. Fruit clustered on every bush, to be had for the picking. In May mulberries grew luscious, strawberries in June, blackberries in July; and all sorts of nuts, not to mention pumpkins, persimmons, and papaws, ripened during the fall. There was plenty of fish in the brooks, game in the woods, and health, wealth and happiness everywhere.

Such was Johnnie's world—such was the garden of Eden! But the tree of knowledge was there, and the serpent; and when one had tasted



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the fruit he was sure to realize his own nakedness and recognize good and evil, even as in Paradise. Moreover, his bread was not to be acquired except by profuse perspiration, and Johnnie early learned this lesson.

Chief among his duties was doing chores, a term including all manner of unclassified labor on the farm—hewing wood, drawing water, feeding cattle, milking, riding, driving, walking, running. The catalogue was simply endless. Chores awoke him early each morning, and always bade him a tardy, tired good night. They were never done. They assumed Protean shapes and Titanic dimensions. He turned the horses into the pasture at night to trudge after them again in the morning; he weeded the onion bed to-day, hoed potatoes to-morrow, and weeded the onion bed on the day after. Whatsoever he sowed that also he had to reap, and sow and reap again. Nay, the Biblical axiom did not express it by half; for not only must he reap and sow, but prepare the soil and till it.

One of the most formidable subdivisions of the chores was known as running errands. It was always run; never walk or ride. Run over to

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Mr. Smith's and borrow his post-auger; run down to Aunt Mary's and get a pint of flour; run to the house and fetch a jug of water; run to the field and call the men to dinner; run the calf out of the yard; run the pigs out of the corn-field; run away; run home; run, run everywhere! That was Johnnie's strongest reason for wanting wings, so that he could rest his limbs now and then by flying.



Some people seemed to think that boys never grow tired,—as if they were not always tired, except when playing.

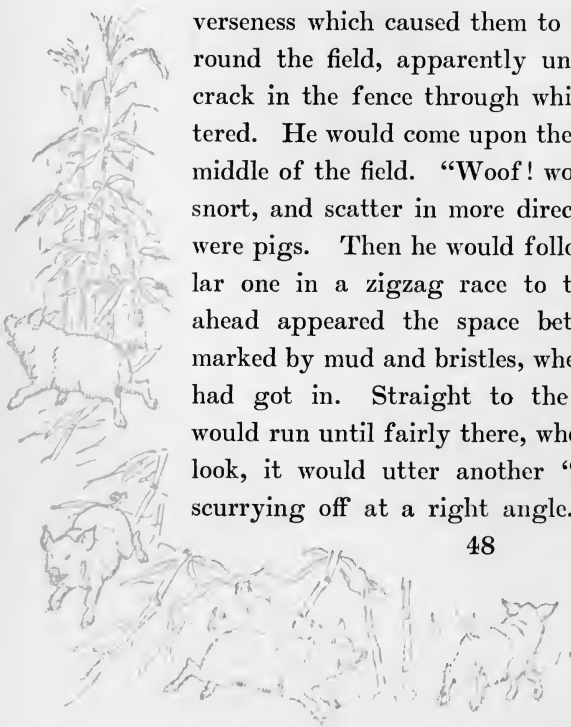
Running errands would doubtless exhaust all boys and dwarf their natures beyond repair were it not for their genius for evasion. Imagine Johnnie running all the way to Aunt Mary's and back again without once stopping. He knew it was impracticable, preposterous; for how could he run over fences and through the creek? No boy could run in water up to his neck, and the only other way to cross was on a dangerous, slippery log. Being convinced that the command could not be obeyed literally, he did not undertake it. He would start in a run; but when he came to the creek he usually



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stripped and swam it, dog-fashion, back and forth several times, and then walked cautiously over the log; and when he reached home he explained that his hair was wet from having run so fast.

But running the pigs out of the corn presented no pretext for diversion. There was no creek in the corn-field, and if there had been the pigs would never have gone near it. Pigs are peculiar creatures. Johnnie believed they were all possessed of devils, and that it was pure perverseness which caused them to circle round and round the field, apparently unable to find the crack in the fence through which they had entered. He would come upon them rooting in the middle of the field. "Woof! woof!" they would snort, and scatter in more directions than there were pigs. Then he would follow some particular one in a zigzag race to the fence. Just ahead appeared the space between two rails, marked by mud and bristles, where the marauder had got in. Straight to the crack the pig would run until fairly there, when, with a scared look, it would utter another "woof!" and go scurrying off at a right angle. In the mean-







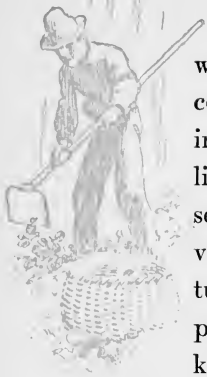
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time its companions in crime were peacefully feeding again, and, seeking them out, Johnnie would choose another for a second heat, with the same exasperating result as before. Finally, when he had become absolutely worn out and flung himself in a shaded fence-corner to breathe, the whole herd of swine would file demurely past him, and with squeal and grunt march deliberately out of their own free will.

There are some kinds of work which can be slighted, and, if Johnnie could have had his preference, he would always have chosen these. For instance, when sent alone to plant a pint of beans by sticking holes near hills of corn—one for each bean—he could economize time at the expense of beans by planting a dozen at each place, and throwing the last double handful into a bottomless crawfish hole.

But perhaps the most satisfactory variety of labor was that which, by a stretch of the imagination, he could persuade himself was not work at all, but play, or at least some novel and wonderfully lucrative employment. Johnnie was not an utterly lazy boy. It was not action he disliked, but tedium and restraint. Chiefly he

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wanted to be a man, to do a man's work, to accomplish great things. Digging potatoes was, in itself, dismal drudgery, but by making-believe each potato was a nugget of gold and himself a delving miner it became a really splendid vocation. Nor was cutting thistles in the pasture a playful thing, yet, when he called each plant an armed enemy and himself a bold knight-errant, it became a pleasant pastime. So it was with many forms of chore-work, but he could never conjure up any satisfactory glamour for the tasks of weeding onions and chopping stove-wood.

All in all, Johnnie's vacations were far from empty, and he found little time and less inclination for schoolward yearnings. In the intervals between chores, he devised many ways of amusing himself, and the dearth of boy-companions was largely supplied by his dog Pluto. A dog is almost as good a playmate and is a better friend than a boy. He never tires of being "It" in a game of tag, and will endure every form of imposition without complaining.

Pluto was a democratic dog, having no more of a pedigree than his master. True, he pos-



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sessed traits which led Johnnie to believe that he was full-blooded; but his ancestry was unknown. His yellow coat and squatty legs lent color and form to the conviction that he was just an ordinary "fice." Johnnie and Pluto were inseparable. Much of Johnnie's spare time was spent in teaching the dog tricks. These tricks were wonderful to relate, but rather disappointing to see, needing a boy's sympathetic imagination to point out their intelligence. At driving cattle Pluto was a success, except that he always approached them from the front and drove them the wrong way. He was an admirable hunting dog, so far as hunting was concerned, but he seldom actually found any game.

Johnnie had two other occasional comrades, the Hired Hand and Cousin Henry. The latter was three years his senior, and the relationship between him and Johnnie was somewhat similar to that existing between Johnnie and Pluto. Great concessions were necessary on Johnnie's part before Cousin Henry would deign to play with him; and then the sport had to be conducted with manly dignity. Cousin Henry chewed tobacco—in secret—and could "cuss." Moreover,

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it was whispered, and never denied by him, that he had gone with girls, escorting them home from meetings and parties. These accomplishments commanded respect, and respect for him compelled obedience to his wishes.

Cousin Henry condescended to pay Johnnie a visit about once a fortnight. For an hour they would get on well enough, playing Indian or cowboy. Then Henry would grow disgusted.

"Aw, say, this is no fun. Where's yer pa's musket?"

"In the house," Johnnie would answer hesitatingly.

"Go get it."

"Pa don't 'low me to."

"Who ast him? Go git it, I tell ye."

Then Johnnie would sneak into the house, and, after a short absence, would return with the intelligence that he couldn't find the gun "no place"—which was grammatically true, but to all intents a lie.

"I'll tell ye what," Henry would exclaim a few minutes later, "let's go over to Shank's melon-patch."

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"All right!" Johnnie would answer with ill-assumed alacrity.

Across the fields they would hasten with bated breath until the fence in the rear of the Shanks' premises was reached. There Henry would kneel and point out the melon-patch to Johnnie, whispering:

"Now, you're smaller'n me. You'll find the best ones up next to the garden. Be quick an' keep yer eyes peeled for the dog!" And quaking with terror, Johnnie would obey. In almost every instance the dog saw Johnnie and charged on him before he got half way across the lot. On one occasion he was forced to climb a peach-tree to save himself. Cousin Henry forsook him ignominiously, and he might have perished there if Shank's hired girl had not come to his release. Yet such experiences never shook his faith in Cousin Henry. His constancy was very like Pluto's.

There are men, as well as dogs and boys, who will take kicks from one and resent a look from another.



VII

THE HIRED HAND AND "HA'NTS"

THE Hired Hand was Johnnie's oracle. His auguries were infallible; from his decisions there was no appeal. The wisdom of experienced age was his, and he always stood willing to impart it to the youngest. No question was too trivial for him to consider, and none too abstruse for him to answer. He did not tell Johnnie to "never mind" or wait until he grew older, but was ever willing to pause in his work to explain things. And his oracular qualifications were genuine. He had traveled—had even been as far as the State Fair; he had read—from Robinson Crusoe to Dick the Dead Shot, and, more than all, he had meditated deeply.

The Hired Hand's name was Eph. Perhaps he had another name, too, but if so it had become obsolete. Far and wide he was known simply as Eph.

Eph was generally termed "a cur'ous feller,"

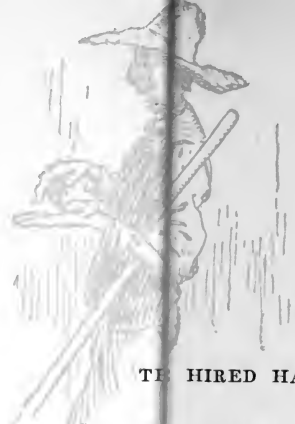


THE HIRED HAND AND "HA'NTS"

and this characterization applied equally well to his peculiar appearance and his inquiring disposition. In his confirmation nature had evidently sacrificed her love of beauty to a temporary passion for elongation. Length seemed to have been the central thought, the theme, as it were, upon which he had been composed. This effect was heightened by generously broad hands and feet and a contrastingly abbreviated chin. The latter feature caused his countenance to wear in repose a decidedly vacant look, but it was seldom caught reposing, usually having to bear a smirk of some sort.

Eph's position in the Winkle household was as peculiar as his personality. Nominally he was a hired servant, but, in fact, from his own point of view at least, he was Mr. Winkle's private secretary and confidential adviser. He had been on the place "ever sence old Fan was a yearlin'," which was a long while, indeed; and had come to regard himself as indispensable. The Winkles treated him as one of the family, and he reciprocated in truly familiar ways. He sat at the table with them, helped entertain their guests, and often accompanied them to





VII

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church. In regulating matters on the farm Mr. Winkle proposed, but Eph invariably disposed, in a diplomatic way, of course; and, although his judgment might be based on false logic, the result was generally successful and satisfactory.

With all his good qualities and her attachment to him, however, Mrs. Winkle was not sure that Eph's moral status was quite sound, and she was inclined to discourage Johnnie's association with him. As a matter of fact she had overheard Johnnie utter several bad words, of which Eph was certainly the prime source. But a mother's solicitude was of little avail when compared with Eph's Delphian wisdom. Johnnie would steal away to join Eph in the field at every chance, and the information he acquired at these secret séances was varied and valuable.

It was Eph who taught him how to tell the time of day by the sun; how to insert a "dutchman" in the place of a lost suspender button; how to make bird-traps; and how to "skin a cat." Eph initiated him into the mysteries of magic and witchcraft, and showed him how to locate a subterranean vein of water by means of a twig





THE HIRED HAND AND "HA'NTS"

of witch-hazel. Eph also confided to Johnnie that he himself could stanch the flow of blood or stop a toothache instantly by force of a certain charm, but he could not tell how to do this because the secret could be imparted only from man to woman, or vice versa. Even the shadowy domain of spirits had not been exempt from Eph's investigations, and he related many a terrifying experience with "ha'nts."

Johnnie was first introduced to the ghost world one summer night, when he and Eph had gone fishing together.

"If ye want to ketch the big uns, always go at night in the dark o' the moon," said Eph, and his piscatorial knowledge was absolute.

They had fished in silence for some time, and Johnnie was nodding, when Eph suddenly whispered:

"Let's go home, sonny, I think I see a ha'nt down yander."

Johnnie had no idea what a "ha'nt" might be, but Eph's constrained manner betokened something dreadful.

It was not until they had come within sight of home that Johnnie ventured to inquire:

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“Say, Eph, what is a ha’nt?”

“Huh! What is ha’nts? Why, sonny, you mean to tell me you don’t know what ha’nts is?”

“Not exactly; sompin’ like wildcats, ain’t they?”

“Well, I’ll be confounded! Wildcats! Not by a long shot;” and Eph broke into the soft chuckle which always preceded his explanations. They reached the orchard fence, and, seating himself squarely on the topmost rail, Eph began impressively:

“Ha’nts is the remains of dead folks—more ’specially them that’s been assinated, er, that is, kilt—understan’? They’re kind o’ like sperrits, ye know. After so long a time they take to comin’ back to yarth an’ ha’ntin’ the pre-cise spot where they wuz murdered. They always come after dark, an’ the diff’runt shapes they take on is supprisin’. I have seed ha’nts that looked like sheep, an’ ha’nts that looked like human persons; but lots of ’em ye cain’t see a-tall, bein’ invisible, as the sayin’ is. Now, fer all we know, they may be a ha’nt settin’ right here betwixt us, this minute!”

With this solemn declaration Johnnie shiv-

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ered and began edging closer to Eph, until restrained and appalled by the thought that he might actually sit on the unseen spirit by such movement.

"But do they hurt people, Eph?" he asked anxiously.

Eph gave vent to another chuckle.

"Not if ye understan' the'r ways," he observed sagely. "If ye let 'em alone an' don't go foolin' aroun' the'r ha'ntin'-groun' they'll never harm ye. But don't ye never trifle with no ha'nt, sonny. I knowed a feller 't thought 'twuz smart to hector 'em an' said he wuzn't feared. Onct he throwed a rock at one—"

Here Eph paused.

"What h-happened?" gasped Johnnie.

"In one year from that time," replied Eph gruesomely, "that there feller's cow wuz hit by lightnin'; in three year his hoss kicked him an' busted a rib; an' in seven year he wuz a corpse!"

The power of this horrible example was too much for Johnnie.

"Don't you reckon it's bedtime?" he suggested tremblingly.

Thenceforth for many months Johnnie led a

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haunted life. Ghosts glowered at him from cellar and garret. Specters slunk at his heels, phantoms flitted through the barn. Twilight teemed with horrors, and midnight, when he awoke at that hour, made of his bedroom a veritable Brocken.

It was vain for his parents to expostulate with him. Was one not bound to believe one's own eyes? And how about the testimony of the Hired Hand?

The story in his reader—told in verse and graphically illustrated—of the boy named Walter, who, being alone on a lonesome highway one dark night, beheld a sight that made his blood run cold, acquired an abnormal interest for Johnnie. Walter, with courage resembling madness, marched straight up to the alleged ghost and laughed gleefully to find, "It was a friendly guide-post, his wand'ring steps to guide."

This was all very well, as it turned out, but what if it had been a sure-enough ghost, reflected Johnnie. What if it had reached down with its long, snaky arms and snatched Walter up—and run off with him in the dark—and no telling what? Or it might have swooped

THE HIRED HAND AND "HA'NTS"

straight up in the air with him, for ghosts could do that. Johnnie resolved he would not take any chances with friendly guide-posts which might turn out to be hostile spirits.

Then there was the similar tale of the lame goose, and the one concerning the pillow in the swing—each intended, no doubt, to allay foolish fears on the part of children, but exercising an opposite and harrowing influence upon Johnnie.

It happened about this time, too, that Cousin Henry loaned Johnnie a contraband volume of the *Arabian Nights*. There the miracles of mighty magic were described in plain black and white, calculated to dispel all doubts. Lying prone in the haymow, or reclining against the straw-stack, Johnnie gloated over the book by the hour. There were passages in the narratives which became so terribly vivid that Johnnie would be compelled to put the book down and run to the house. In dreams of enchantment he wandered through the adjacent woods looking for the entrance to Aladdin's cave. He fancied a dingy brass ring on his finger might be a magic talisman, and rubbed it vigorously, half

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expecting and half fearing its genii would appear. From its garret-grave he unearthed the hobby-horse of other days, and searched it over for a secret peg, such as the Hindu magician's horse possessed, and the turning of which gave the beast the power of flying.

But Mrs. Winkle found and confiscated the cherished book one day, and its whilom enchantment was smothered in misgivings as to how he could account for its loss to its jealous owner.

The day of judgment was not long in coming. Mrs. Winkle sat up half the night inspecting the volume, and wrestled with nightmares until morning. Then she took it under her arm and hurried down to Aunt Mary's.

"Did you know your boy was lending Johnnie such books as this?" she asked sharply.

Aunt Mary did not know it. Indeed she had never seen the book before.

"Well, it's dreadful nonsense," said Mrs. Winkle. "Full of witches and charms and such stuff. Some of it is downright wicked; you ought to read it!"

Aunt Mary took the book somewhat gin-

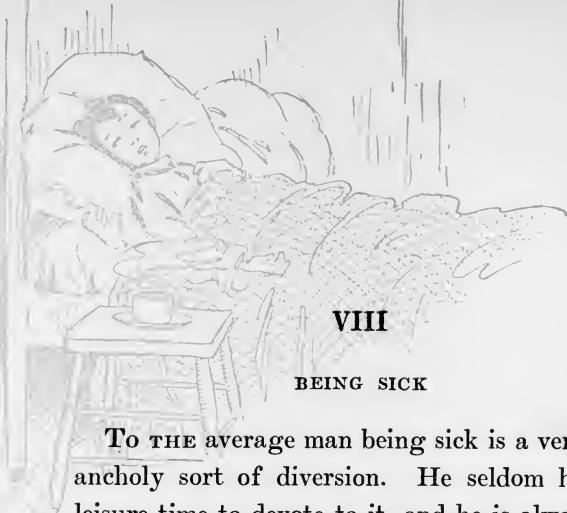
THE HIRED HAND AND "HA'NTS"

gerly. She was sure she didn't know where Henry could have got it, but she would look into it.

So the book was perused carefully by Aunt Mary, who confessed herself duly horrified by its contents; and, by way of pointing the moral of its immorality, Henry was severely punished for having brought the sinful thing on the place.

Henry got even by thrashing Johnnie; but Johnnie, as usual, had to bottle his resentment, eking out only a small portion of it by going around behind the barn and throwing pebbles at the chickens. There were times when Johnnie wished longingly for a younger brother.





VIII

BEING SICK

TO THE average man being sick is a very melancholy sort of diversion. He seldom has the leisure time to devote to it, and he is always oppressed with the unpleasant probabilities of speedy dissolution and the dire certainty of doctors' bills to pay. But to the average boy these terrors occur not, and to him being sick stands next in enjoyment to a fishing excursion. A sick man always has lungs, a heart, and a liver—to say nothing of a self-assertive stomach—and these organs are constantly becoming fatally deranged so as to require his strict attention. But the sick boy has none of these organs, except his stomach. Even the sober contemplation of death does not greatly perturb the philosopher of twelve, for he always looks upon his own demise from the pathetic but impersonal standpoint of the grief-stricken friends or remorseful enemies of the deceased.

BEING SICK

The season of cucumbers and unripe fruit always marked a period of poor health in Johnnie's career. The rose-tint of hardy youth suddenly faded from his cheeks, and he grew pallid and "bilious" and full of pain. At such times he was inclined to become preternaturally kind and patient, enduring everything with martyr-like resignation; and death, having a proverbial fondness for shining marks, was fully expected by himself and feared by his distressed mother.

As he lay quietly in bed reflecting upon such grave matters, his imagination was wont to grow active and tender, and hot tears often scalded his cheeks as he thought of the terrible void his untimely taking off would make in the world. His disconsolate parents, his heart-broken playmates, the sad and remorseful Cousin Henry—who thrashed him only last week—ah, if he had only known!—all these rose up and gathered around his bed to mourn until his own soft heart was touched and he mingled his tears with theirs. In pity for their distress he freely forgave them for every injury they had heaped upon him, and, in short, conjured up for himself a death-



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bed scene as beautiful and heartrending as any ever figured in by Eva or Little Nell.

"Mother," he moaned feebly—he always said "ma" when well—"mother, won't you please send for Cousin Henry?"

An hour later when that worthy appeared he whispered:

"Henry, I am going to give you my red-and-blue lead-pencil."

"Bully for you!" cried Henry, snatching up the prize. "Say, I'm going to take this apple, too. The doctor says you can't eat it," and Henry rushed off whistling merrily.

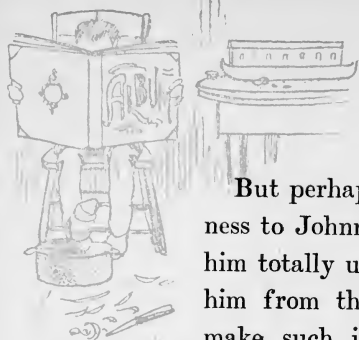
This act of heartlessness somewhat marred the pleasantness of dying; in fact it caused Johnnie to postpone death for the time and to demand the return of the pencil; but there was many another solace remaining.

What country boy has not enjoyed the untold comforts of the ague? Certainly there is none who has been immune in the valley of the Wabash. The weary, aching bones, which rendered rest so delicious, the fit of shaking, and the burning fever, so sure to bring sympathy and all sorts of dainty food—sweet and tender is the

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memory, and the only bitter recollection it awakens is that of quinine.

Sometimes malaria attacks a boy during a season of holiday—but not often. Usually its onset is identical with the beginning of harvest. Johnnie was stricken while helping shock wheat, and the Hired Hand had to lead him to the house. There his mother tucked him into the ever-cool bed in the spare room and set Cousin Elmira to keeping the flies off of him. Then what luxury of earthly bliss could equal his! He closed his eyes softly, dreamily, in a tranquillity of satisfaction. Through the open window came the far off hum of the reaper; but its drowsy tones, which had seemed to mock him as he toiled a little while ago, were soothing as a lullaby now, and mingled with the song of the wind in the maples, the lazy buzzing of flies, and the clink of dishes in the kitchen. He kept his bed resolutely until toward evening. Then he crept out to look upon the world again. It was all very beautiful and peaceful, with just a tinge of twilight sadness. Poor little invalid! How he longed to run and play again as he used to do—but the chores were not yet done.



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But perhaps the most satisfactory state of illness to Johnnie was that which, while rendering him totally unable to work, did not incapacitate him from the milder forms of amusement, or make such indulgence inconsistent. For this purpose nothing served better than a badly bruised toe, or a boil on the knee. Even a fractured limb he would have welcomed as not without compensation. Under such affliction he was justified in returning to his old Noah's ark and paper soldiers, toys which Cousin Henry's scorn had caused him to forsake long ago. A cripple had a right to be babyish. He was also permitted to whittle in the house, and make all manner of musses.

Moreover, there were certain rare books, sealed to him in health, to which his indisposition gave him free access. The wonderful photograph album, with the pictures of grandpa and grandma, and brave Uncle Andrew, who was a sutler in the army, and pa and ma when they were first married and had diamonds and dimples—the former at least, supplied by the accommodating artist—what a feast of beauty and marvels it was! The pon-





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derous family Bible was fully as great an attraction. It was worth a good deal of physical suffering to be permitted to pore over its ancient pages and gaze on the graphic representations of Goliath in the act of being slain, of Samson pulling down the temple, of John the Baptist's gory head on a platter, and the myriads of angels with little wings on their backs. And he loved, too, to study the pictures of the twelve apostles—or the twelve epistles—he could never quite remember which it was.

When these books grew exhausted there were the three thick volumes of Agricultural Reports, which a generous member of Congress had presented to his father. They were replete with familiar illustrations, and strange words that pleased Johnnie while they puzzled him. It was a wonderful thing to discover that the caterpillar, which he had known all his life, was really the larva of a lepidopterous insect; that corn was maize; and that cattle died of rinderpest. In one of the books was an ornithological table containing the proper names of birds, which was vastly entertaining and very instructive to aspiring agriculturists. He found that the sparrow

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belonged to the fringillidæ family; that it was grammivorous and also insectivorous, therefore a friend to the farmer; that the talpa, or mole, was a genus of quadrupeds, living chiefly underground and feeding upon insects; and that silos were good for ensilage. Nowhere else, and under no other conditions, could Johnnie have acquired the miscellany of information thus afforded. Truly he felt that his affliction was a blessing in thin disguise.

In fact, to Johnnie, the only really unpleasant thing about being sick was the getting well. There came a time when scarcely a shadow of the disease remained, when even the scrupulous old doctor pronounced him strong and well, and the manifold burdens of life had to be assumed again. The chores to which he had become a stranger began to beckon him to the barn, and long neglected errands ran to meet him. Yet there was compensation even for his convalescence. Every denizen of the barnyard, excepting the pigs, seemed glad of his return. Pluto welcomed him with heartiness more than human, and the Hired Hand flattered him with kindness and solicitude.

BEING SICK

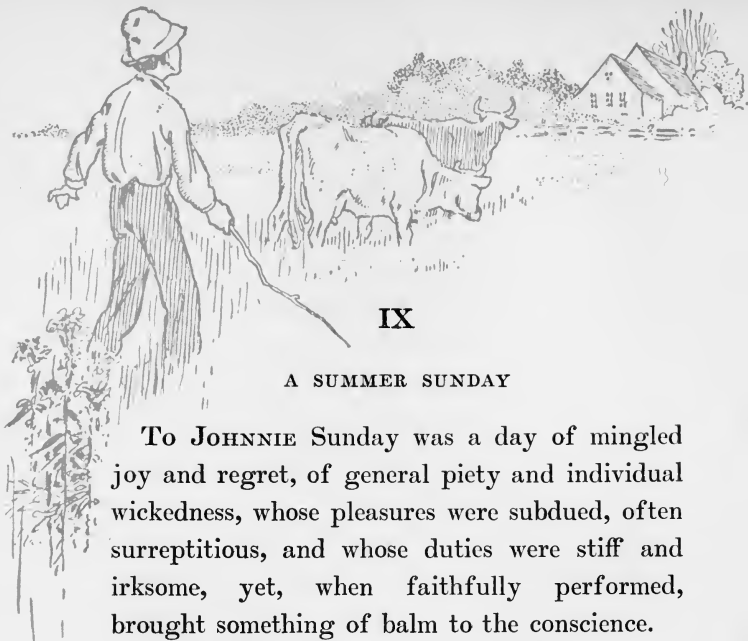
Aunt Mary came over and made him feel especially delicate and spirituelle by her anxiety.

"Why, lawsy me, Johnnie," she exclaimed, "I wouldn't a' known you! You look so peaked and thin. Sister, you must be careful of that boy, or you'll never raise him. Has he got his flannel on? Did you ever give him burdock tea and dandelion? and you surely aren't lettin' him go barefooted, are you?"

Such was the psychical effect of her voluble comments that Johnnie crept off to bed again and came very near having another chill. But a single dose of the prescribed burdock compound caused him to rally quickly.

Johnnie's gustatory nerves were developed far in excess of his sympathetic system.





IX

A SUMMER SUNDAY

TO JOHNNIE Sunday was a day of mingled joy and regret, of general piety and individual wickedness, whose pleasures were subdued, often surreptitious, and whose duties were stiff and irksome, yet, when faithfully performed, brought something of balm to the conscience.

It was but partially a season of rest. True, regular farm work was strictly foregone, but the chores, the burden of which fell largely on his small shoulders, could not be neglected. He had to rise just as early and trudge just as far across the pasture in search of the cows as on week days. Moreover, the sacredness of the day, as interpreted by his pious parents, forbade his indulgence in levitous whistling and loud calling, such as lightened the labors at other times. Secular songs were iniquitous and not to be thought of; and, in order to refrain from downright sin, on particularly bright Sun-



A SUMMER SUNDAY

day mornings, he was sometimes compelled to compromise with the spirit of the day and his own exuberance by humming the tune of Yankee Doodle while mentally inserting the words of the doxology.

Johnnie was incensed by the unusual abandon with which the birds sang on Sunday, and, while morally shocked at their sinfulness, secretly envied them their liberty. It was not wrong, he thought, to throw stones at them under such a double provocation. But he did not dare go far out of his way in their pursuit, for he could never dismiss from mind a tragic Sabbath-school-paper tale of a little boy who once followed a strange bird into a dark forest with uncanny and distressing results. It was a very peculiar bird, with a good deal of crimson in its plumage, and it led the thoughtless boy on and on until he found himself alone in the darkness with a terrible thunder-storm raging. Then he caught the bird, and—horror of horrors! Across its flaming breast in letters of black was written the word “Sin.” The storm and the darkness were frightful enough, but the supernatural inscription the bird bore was absolutely



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blood-curdling. This story impressed its obvious lesson upon Johnnie, to beware of strange birds, especially red ones.

After chores and breakfast were done, hasty preparations were made for Sunday-school. Johnnie's Sunday clothes were brought forth, and his bare and brier-scarred feet bathed and shackled in shoes. Ah! unhappy necessity of encasing this summer's feet in last winter's shoes; it was like imprisoning a rosebud in a block of ice. When Johnnie donned his Sunday suit he put off the happy good humor in which nature had swathed him, and became as degenerate as Adam after the adoption of fig-leaf apparel. In his old clothes his peccadillos were apt to be of a thoughtless and harmless character, but when he was dressed up he was inclined to deliberate transgression. On the way to Sunday-school he dangled his feet over the end-gate of the spring wagon and made monstrous faces at the boy behind. When the class-room was reached he wriggled and winked and pinched his mates and chewed sassafras root, making believe it was tobacco—in short, indulged in manifold forms of original sin. In

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this way Johnnie gained the reputation of being a very bad boy, when really it was his stiff, ill-fitting clothing that was bad.

Johnnie always remained for church, because he had to, and there the diversive alternative of mischief failed him, and he was compelled to be content with empty sleep or vain speculation. But even there his elastic imagination was an untold comfort, and the curious ideas and vaporous views of things which wandered through his mind as the minister crept from "firstly" down to "lastly" and "again" and "in conclusion" were wonderful to relate. He wondered why the deacon in the pew in front had no hair; why his head was so highly polished; how it felt to be bald; if he himself would ever be bald; and why little boys could not be bald without waiting till they grew up. He speculated as to how the preacher would look when he became a corpulent angel with wings; and as to whether angels soared like buzzards, or flopped their wings like chickens, or buzzed like flies. He wished he had his wings on now; and he knew what he would do pretty quick. He would not stay there very long. Would

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not it make a stir, though, if he should suddenly mount to the ceiling with a glad flutter and go sailing out through the arched window across the fields! How high he would soar, and to what mighty distances he would take his flight! With such absurd fancies as these Johnnie passed the tedious hours. Little enough of the minister's learned discourse penetrated his ears, and less found its way to his comprehension.

When the final prayer was spoken, and the benediction pronounced, Johnnie, in common with many of his elders, and, indeed, some of the elders of the church, breathed a sigh of relief.

Home and dinner lay before him; and, although the Sunday meal was likely to be frugal, its crystal water and cold meat created a refreshing oasis in the religious desert round about him. Even a temporary shifting of the wind from a spiritual to a physical quarter was comforting to Johnnie.

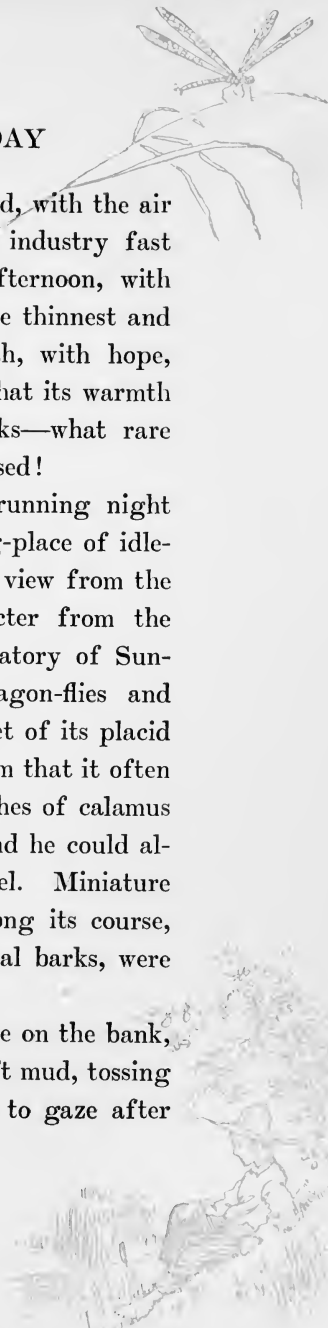
After dinner Johnnie's shoes slipped off as by magic, and then away the truant feet went scurrying across the meadow with a speed that took his breath. Sunday afternoon, with lazy-

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ness loitering at his side unrebuked, with the air full of shimmering dreams, and industry fast asleep for the day! Sunday afternoon, with bare feet, with straw hat, with the thinnest and simplest of garments, with youth, with hope, with a world so full of sunshine that its warmth overflowed into the shadiest nooks—what rare possibilities for pleasure it possessed!

Down where the brook kept running night and day was the favorite trysting-place of idleness and himself. It was out of view from the house, and haunted by no specter from the world of week days or the purgatory of Sunday morning. He and the dragon-flies and water-spiders alone knew the secret of its placid charms. It was such a tiny stream that it often became so nearly lost in the marshes of calamus that he had to stoop to find it, and he could almost stop its current with his heel. Miniature water-wheels were constructed along its course, and fairy boats, which were literal barks, were launched upon its breast.

For hours Johnnie would recline on the bank, his feet burrowing deep in the soft mud, tossing numberless chips into the brook, to gaze after



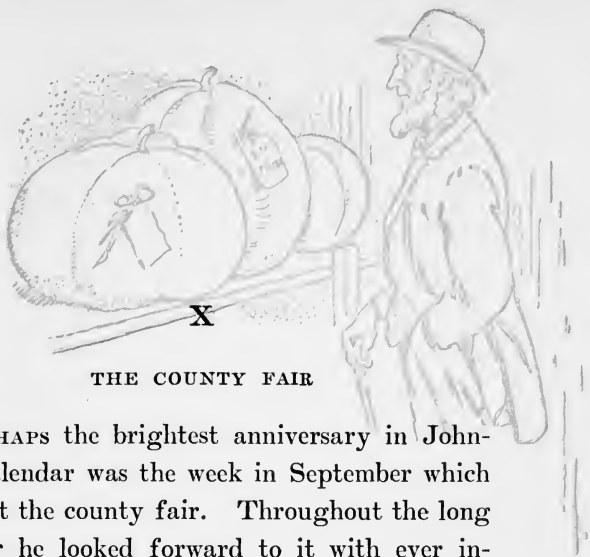


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them and wonder vaguely, dreamily, whither they would drift at last. And even as the brook sang its one song and dreamed its one dream of the sea the boy's idle musings would turn toward distant manhood, and he would wonder and wonder. And the ultimate reach of his boyish imagination or the final destiny of the restless brook no finite mind may determine.

Sunday evening drew on, at length, with the same monotonous round of chores again. The cows were to be gathered in and milked, just as if they had never undergone the process before; and, as the sun went down, seated on a three-legged stool, his head pressed confidently against old Brindle's flank, his eyes fixed in thoughtful reverie upon the western sky—whether in contemplation of its beauty, or the beauty beyond, or of some quaint conception of internal origin, we know not—Johnnie bade farewell to many a Sunday.





THE COUNTY FAIR

PERHAPS the brightest anniversary in Johnnie's calendar was the week in September which brought the county fair. Throughout the long summer he looked forward to it with ever increasing gladness. There was never any question as to whether he should be permitted to attend the fair. It was the one great place of amusement in his world which was eminently proper, where pleasure might be indulged in unstintedly without a qualm.

The fair ground, a spacious native grove, well set in blue-grass, was situated a mile from the corporate limits of the town. For eleven months out of each year it was a deserted village. Birds nested in its trees, squirrels and chipmunks gamboled in the huge horticultural hall, and spiders worked geometrical problems in amphitheater and bandstand. Its utter emptiness and desolation tended to oppress

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Johnnie when he passed it on occasional pilgrimages to the county seat. A painful air of the vanished glory of Vanity Fair seemed to hover about it.

But annually with the advent of autumn an army of rustics invaded its precincts; and for the space of one week it became a teeming city in miniature. In a general way this sudden transformation was wonderful, while its special features were simply miraculous.

On the morning of the first day of the fair the Winkle household arose bright and early. Johnnie awoke from ecstatic dreams with a thrill, bounced out of bed and into his clothes with supernatural agility, and had the horses up from the pasture in short order. There was but one matter of solicitude to mar his joy. The weather—which takes the place of fate on a farm—might prove unfavorable. Perhaps an inauspicious streak of scarlet vapor lay across the face of the sun, or a dim, slaty mass of clouds hung on the western horizon, which might easily bring rain; and Johnnie waited upon the Hired Hand in a fever of anxiety to learn his prediction.

THE COUNTY FAIR



"You don't think it'll rain to-day, do you, Eph?" he asked with an assumption of confidence. Then Eph, the astrologer, went forth and scanned the heavens, noted the direction of the wind, and observed the behavior of the stock and various meteorological phenomena.

"It all de-pends on the way the moon hung last night," he remarked gravely, "which I didn't notice. The signs is mostly favorable"—Johnnie's countenance brightened—"fer rain, but I ain't shore."

As the sun mounted higher, however, the clouds disappeared, and at eight o'clock the family was safely en route. What a glamour lay over the world that morning! How gaily, how madly the kaleidoscopic landscape circled on countless pivots as the wagon rumbled on! Backward the fences and trees of the foreground slipped, smoothly, silently, while those in the distance rushed ever forward, until Johnnie almost convinced himself that he was really standing still between two mammoth revolving planes of scenery.

Once they passed a field where a boy of his own size was laboriously cutting weeds, and the



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sight made Johnnie ill. He wondered how any mortal could work in that lonely, hot field and the fair going on! That boy's parents were certainly brutes.

After a while they found themselves in the midst of a long procession of wagons and carriages, and Johnnie could scarcely contain himself because they moved so slowly. A mile ahead the fair ground loomed into sight, and yet it seemed they would never reach it. The distant hum of the crowds, like the buzz of swarming bees, broke on their ears, and presently the beatific strains of the brass band.

At last they were there. Johnnie could hardly realize it, but it was true. The tickets were handed over, the gates were entered, and the suppressed hum of happy humanity burst into a mighty chorus. Johnnie stood up in the wagon and tried to take it all in. Rows of canvas tents, big and little, flaming pictures, candy stands, striking-machines, shooting-galleries, museums, minstrels, magicians, and people—people everywhere!

“Now, Johnnie, you stay right here in this

THE COUNTY FAIR

wagon till pa puts the horses away," Mrs. Win-
kle admonished him, turning round.

But Johnnie heard her not. His attention was fixed upon a beautiful flaxen-haired girl, who was entwining a monstrous snake about her neck. Slipping down he ran in her direction to get a nearer view. Immediately he was swallowed in the multitude, becoming one of its molecular elements to vibrate hither and thither, attracted and repelled and swept along in irresistible currents throughout the day. The spirit of the occasion saturated him; in everything on exhibition he found delight. Climbing into the amphitheater, he looked down in admiration upon horses and cattle such as he saw daily at home. He found wonders in the way of swine in the pigsties, petting the baby-pigs and calling them "cute" just as did his city cousins. For the live stock at the fair was not common live stock; the sheep were aristocrats, the poultry was pure-bred and took premiums, even the pumpkins on exhibition were unusual, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Just as work may be lightened by



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calling it play, a cow may be completely transfigured and glorified by exhibiting her at the fair.

Yet the more mysterious exhibition going on within the big tent over near the fence was by far the greatest attraction, and every path Johnnie tried finally led him to its door. A large, many-colored banner stretched in front illustrated a few of the numerous wonders to be seen on the inside, and every now and then a mechanically talking man would come out and explain the pictures. The Snake-charmer, the Prestidigitator, the Woman with the Iron Jaw and the Wild Man from Madagascar were all there—all to be seen for the paltry sum of ten cents. The price was certainly ridiculously low. At the entrance sat a little boy, no bigger than Johnnie, who turned a hand organ, producing an endless strain of sweet music. As Johnnie stood and stared, his breast heaved with envy of that boy. Doubtless it was his pa who owned the whole show, and he could behold its marvels whenever he liked. Johnnie wished his father would turn showman and let him grind





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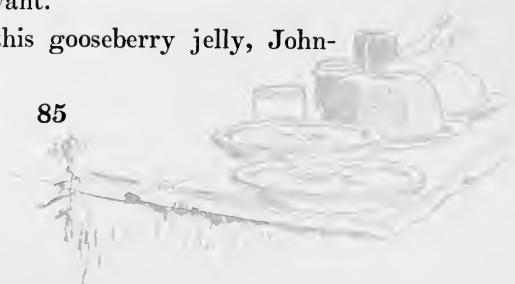
the organ. Anyhow he was determined to see the inside of the show before he went home.

Eph stepped up behind him.

"See here, sonny," he cried threateningly, "what you mean, standin' roun' here, an' everybody waitin' dinner on ye, and' yore ma putty nigh dis-tracted!" When, a few moments later, Johnnie and Eph came upon the family, grouped about an immense expanse of snowy table-linen on the grass, what a feast of all that is delicious greeted their eyes!

Aunt Mary's folks had "joined teams" with the Winkles, and the tender chicken, rich cake, and pies, and jams, and jellies, and luscious fruit they brought from their baskets were astonishing to look upon. If the fair needed a complement to render its pleasures ideally perfect, it was found in this picnic dinner. The men and boys lolled on the grass and reached luxuriously for bread and chicken, while Mrs. Winkle and Aunt Mary fluttered about like ministering angels, vying with each other in anticipation of every want.

"Have some of this gooseberry jelly, John-



JOHNNIE

nie," Aunt Mary would say, while Mrs. Winkle was piling a mountain of pastry under Cousin Henry's nose; or, "Eph, help yourself to the pound-cake—though goodness knows it's the poorest I ever baked."

Then the two good housewives would get together and volubly deplore how the butter had not "gathered" properly, how the bread had refused to rise, and how the jam had shown signs of working. In the meantime the men continued to eat heartily and promptly to extol everything they tasted. It was etiquette for the women to deprecate and the men to praise each article of food produced.

The meal was finished at last, and, in spite of gastric heaviness and conscientious scruples, Johnnie made bold to ask his father for a dime; and so overflowing was Mr. Winkle's good humor that he responded with a whole quarter.

The show was soon visited, and an extra nickel was invested in a glass of red lemonade, which looked beautiful, and which Johnnie tried to imagine tasted correspondingly.

Objects of absorbing interest were simply innumerable and inexhaustible at the fair. Here

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was a man handling writhing coils of hot taffy as fearlessly as the girl handled snakes; there was a wealth of golden jewelry being given away in prize-boxes; beyond stood a huckster selling handkerchiefs, pencils, and note paper, an armful for a dime.

Toward evening Johnnie purchased a sack of peanuts and, leaning wearily against a tree, spent a satisfying half-hour just watching the surging masses of people. To one whose entire life has been spent amid the pastoral quiet of the country, there is a peculiar and exciting pleasure in seeing crowds. The great bustling world of men and women was to Johnnie largely a land of dreams. As his mind had developed he had come to brood more and more upon its vastness, but he found the reality of it all hard to grasp. He dreamed of the sea and saw it mirrored in the mill-pond. Brooks answered for rivers, and the merest hills for mountains. But at the fair only could he get an adequate glimpse of the world's inhabitants collectively, as they were. Above and beyond all this, as he gazed and pondered, he was conscious of a thrill of the intoxicating charm of life and motion,



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and felt for the first time the tugging of that strange, magnetic power of human gravity, which yearly draws so many farmer boys to town. These potent influences held him transfixed, gaping at the multitude until it was almost dark; and when Eph found him at last, he followed that worthy monitor to the wagon absently, and rode home in a deep dream. And the burden of his nebulous meditations, crystallized into words, would have run thus: "When I become a man I shall never be content to vegetate on the little farm, like a weed in a fence-corner. I will become a man of the world!"





XI

IN WINTER

TO OLD age, the wings of time seem ruthlessly swift. Every changing season brings fresh regrets, and the passing of summer, the waning of the sun and the fading of leaves is fraught with a sadness akin to despair. It is in the autumn that men grow old and feeble, and death, having thrown off all disguise, stalks boldly abroad in the land. Only in childhood time plods and the procession of the seasons moves too slowly.

Summer slipped away from Johnnie, unregretted. Ere it was half over he had begun to long for the delights of autumn. By him September was greeted as gaily as April, and winter was welcomed with gladness.

He awoke one morning and straightway knew by instinct that snow had fallen during the night. A feeling was in the air of his well ventilated bedroom which betokened snow, and

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dressing in haste he ran out to revel in it. On the eastern sky was a gleam of crimson, like the glow in his own cheeks, and everywhere, on fence and shed-roof, over the fields, up and down the hills, even to the verge of the distant, shadow-cloistered forest, lay the glittering waste of snow, pure, untrodden. Yet, to be accurate, there were a few faint tracks upon it already, and Johnnie's eyes were quick to observe them. Along the garden fence ran a curious little trail, consisting of tiny dots on each side of a tortuous but continuous line, all disappearing suddenly under a rail; and he knew a field-mouse had been there. Not far away were a few dainty triangular imprints where a snowbird had alighted. Out in the barnlot was found a labyrinth of furrows, crossing and recrossing one another in all sorts of fantastic figures, where the cows had ambled about. One of these Johnnie proceeded to follow briskly here and there until it brought him up to old Brindle, shivering with snow-incrusted back, by the fence, where he had pretended not to see her before. The horses, the pigs and the sheep had all left separate and characteristic

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trails in the snow, and each was familiar to Johnnie. It was over in the orchard, though, that he discovered the most alluring tracks. They consisted of two oblong impressions side by side, with a single larger one between and slightly behind them, as though made by some strange, three-legged creature. These groups of imprints were five or six feet apart, and extended in a semi-circle across the orchard lot. Johnnie studied them with the sagacious air of a born huntsman; and not only was he able to determine that they had been made by a rabbit, but also in which direction and with what speed it had been traveling. He had learned how a rabbit in running puts its fore feet down close together, so that they make but one mark.

As soon as breakfast was over he armed himself and took the trail. In his haste, he forgot his mittens, but his steaming breath had abundant power to warm his hands.

The weapon he carried was not dangerous. It was just a rusty old ax. Across the meadow, down the hollow, into the silent heart of the woods he trudged, unmindful of time or distance. Sometimes the tracks led him among

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brambles and dense underbrush, and now and then the wind shook a crackling shower of icicles down upon him, but he pushed on undaunted. Once as he waded through a drift, the snow sifted into the gaping tops of his boots; but, seating himself on a frigid stump, he deliberately pulled them off and emptied them. The frost nipped at his ears in vain. He was proof against cold. Boys have been sent on errands and have been found frozen to death; they have started off to school and met with the same fate; but no boy was ever known to suffer in the least from the cold when hunting rabbits!

After a long but exciting tramp Johnnie came to a point where the trail doubled on itself, and this was a sign that the game was not far away. Sure enough, the tracks presently terminated abruptly in a hollow log, and the rabbit was successfully treed. Then began a series of scientific manœuvres looking to its capture. A rabbit at the end of an oaken tunnel, ten feet in length and six inches in diameter, is seemingly fortified against a boy. But Johnnie was artful. Selecting a long hazel pole, he carefully sharpened two prongs upon

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the smaller end. With this instrument the animal was readily located. And now a very cruel process was resorted to—one painful to describe. Yet from Johnnie's standpoint "twisting" a rabbit was as much a matter of course as is opening an oyster to a longshoreman. The forked stick was entangled in the rabbit's fur and given a rotary motion. Then a swift and forceful withdrawal caused a plaintive squeal, and brought forth a little fur, with some cuticle clinging to it. This operation was repeated again; but bunny persistently refused to be dislodged, and it became evident that other measures would be required. So Johnnie executed a final *coup d'état*. Plugging up the open end of the log, he grasped the ax and began chopping a hole directly over bunny's position. It was a laborious undertaking, but after a half-hour's work, the denuded and dying rabbit was secured. True, from a culinary point of view it was worthless, for the dirt and hair adhering to its skinless flesh could never be successfully removed; but this circumstance did not detract from Johnnie's exultation. Slinging it



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weight and lending dignity to the affair, he proceeded manfully on the homeward march.

The way home was very long—much longer, apparently, than the tortuous trail which had led him hither, and more hilly. The ax also seemed to gain materially in weight, and was extremely burdensome. When, after reaching home, his mother sent him out to chop some stove wood he could hardly wield the implement at all. It took him half an hour to cut six small sticks, and at the end of that time he was almost frozen. He was convinced that such exposure to wintry weather was injurious, and was not surprised to discover that his throat was sore next morning.

Tracking rabbits was but one of many delights which winter rendered possible. Coast-ing, skating, and the building of snow men received due attention from Johnnie; but the absence of proper playmates made such sports a trifle monotonous at times. Snow-balling his two unfailing companions, Pluto and Eph, was not satisfactory. The latter responded too vigorously, the former not at all.

In winter there was a notable unpleasantness connected with doing the chores. Johnny could


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never understand how the cows managed to survive the winter. Certainly their chafed udders were the coldest, clammiest things with which he ever came in contact. He could not milk in mittens, and as he coaxed forth the life-giving fluid with blue, bare fingers he often wondered why it did not appear as ice-cream.

Another decidedly rough task was that of hauling in fodder. This had to be done daily in cold weather, for the cattle's stomachs were insatiable. A shock of fodder, which has stood in the wind and rain all fall, and has been crowned and crystallized by winter's snow and ice, resembles adamant. To pull it apart and load it upon a sled in arctic weather is a tedious and trying operation. A succession of kicks from heavy boot-heels loosens the "butts"; then a long and a strong pull serves to separate a few stalks; and these, when laid on the sled, though never so carefully, are likely to be scattered far and wide by the next gust of wind.

But the winter evenings were long and cheerful, and an afternoon spent in the bitter cold rendered the tropical warmth of the fireplace all the more comforting. The fireplace was the

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sacred altar of the Winkle household, whose vestal fires were never permitted to languish. After supper Mrs. Winkle always took tongs and shovel and prepared a ruddy bed among the coals for the new backlog, which Eph bore in puffing and rolled into place with plaintive groans. Then Mr. Winkle brought the fore-stick, and some dry clapboards for kindling; and after a few minutes of sullen smoldering the flames leaped merrily aloft with the refrain of a soaring lark.

Then it was that Johnnie, ensconced in his own chair, with Pluto at his side, dreamed the sweetest dreams and formed the fondest ties of all his boyhood. The conversation of the family group was apt to be broken and desultory. Sometimes Eph would regale them with extended extracts from his remarkable biography, and Johnnie would listen in wonder while his father dozed. Occasionally Mr. Winkle would become retrospective and relate anecdotes of his own youth—when the pasture field was a woodland swarming with wolves; until Mrs. Winkle grew tenderly reminiscent, and the two would go back over the years hand in hand, with fond allusions





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which Johnnie but dimly understood. But oftener they all sat in peaceful silence, accentuated by the steady tick of the clock, the creaking of his mother's rocking-chair, and the clink of her busy knitting needles, and these were the times which Johnnie recalled long afterward as the happiest of all. Few, perhaps, are the educational advantages of the rustic-born; but every farmer boy learns early, and none ever forgets, the truest, most hallowed meaning of the word home.





XII

CHRISTMAS

THROUGHOUT the greater part of the year Johnnie took little note of the almanac. In a vague way he knew that there were certain rules between its green covers which controlled the movements of the sun and moon, and he had often seen Eph sagely consulting its pages when forecasting the weather. Moreover he was somewhat familiar with the distressful symbolical picture of the mutilated man, surrounded by twins, scorpions and goats, which embellished the first page; but beyond this he seldom penetrated.

As winter drew on, however, the book annually acquired a new interest for him, and from Thanksgiving Day to Christmas he was given to studying its calendar continually. In fact, the first exhaustive use he ever made of his limited knowledge of mathematics was in making repeated calculations as to just how many


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days remained until Christmas, the number of which he would carefully chalk down on the casing of the mantel over the fireplace, as if he were in danger of forgetting it. Johnnie was a true and faithful believer in Christmas, and reveled in its joyous anticipations. For many weeks he dreamed of its wonders night and day. He had already grown too old to believe the legend of Santa Claus any more, and his scrupulous parents had taken pains to undeceive him as to that time-honored myth. But really he would have been very loath to believe them. Upon this point, it is so much easier to retain confidence in the idol-builder than in the iconoclast, had not his own sharp eyes taught him the stern truth of their assertion.

One memorable Christmas Eve he had accidentally awakened at the critical hour, and had discovered, with less than half an eye, that it was his mother who was heaping things into his gaping stockings. And so he no longer believed in good old St. Nicholas, and yet, down in his boyish heart, he could not quite become disillusioned. It is so difficult to unlearn the delightful delusions of childhood that it can

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only be completely accomplished with the help of dull, disenchanting years.



In the light of day Johnnie was practically sure that no Santa Claus existed, but at night, after he had said his prayer and crept into bed, his fancy grew active, and he was inclined to reconsider the matter. Perhaps after all the old tale was true; perhaps his parents had only been making believe that it was false. When he was such a little boy that he wore dresses, he remembered, his mother would take him on her lap and tell him the story of the children's saint. Then she would relate that other wondrous tale of the Christ-child born in a manger. This story still held true, and why not the other? Across his dreams came the tinkle of sleighbells and the tread of reindeer hoofs once more, and over his sleeping face hovered the childish smile of infinite trust and faith.

Christmas Eve, when at last it really came, was a time of glorious hopes and possibilities. The chores were done with a will that night. The horses and cattle received double their accustomed feed, and the wood-box behind the kitchen stove was piled mountain high with

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wood. It was a time of general good cheer; moreover Santa Claus, or some of his minions, might be lurking near, and it was policy to let one's virtues shine. After supper a round of merriment was indulged in by the entire household, ending in a royal game of blind man's buff. Then came the happy ceremony of hanging up the stockings, and after that, the tedious, almost impossible endeavor to get to sleep.

"Now go right to sleep, and Christmas will be here before you can wink," Mrs. Winkle would say encouragingly. So Johnnie would close his eyes and begin to snore as soon as he touched the bed. But Morpheus was not to be won by shamming. Presently the eyes popped open, and the snores ended in wakeful sighs. Then every known expedient was tried by turns. Johnnie endeavored to imagine that it was not Christmas Eve at all, but the day after Christmas, or the night of the Fourth of July, and that there was nothing whatever to look forward to; but all to no avail. He sang to himself, told himself stories, pounded on the bedstead, and turned over and over and over until the bed-clothes tumbled to the floor. Finally, in

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the midst of a profound attempt to think of still another alternative, he fell asleep.

At three in the morning he awoke with a start, and immediately dressed and stole downstairs. The night had already stretched into arctic length, and he could endure the suspense no longer. The fire was low in the fireplace, and the room seemed a very den of uncanny shadows. But through the gloom his distorted stockings were faintly discernible, beckoning him with irresistible allurings. He crept up to them. Yes, they were filled to overflowing, and upon a chair near by was a wonderful surplus of mysterious packages.

Christmas morning dawned at last with its unforgettable feasts and fun. No work was to be done that day. Gaiety and good cheer were the prevailing order. Even ordinary methods of pastime were not to be thought of. Everything had to be unusual and splendid. Aunt Mary and her family were there for dinner, and Uncle Andrew came out from the city with his pockets full of store candy and fire-crackers. And what a glorious, deafening, sulphurous pandemonium ensued! Dinner was a sumptu-

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ous meal, but fraught with mockery for Johnnie, already surfeited with sweetmeats.

How quickly it all passed! The sun went down shortly after dinner, and, just as Johnnie felt himself nearing the zenith of earthly bliss, lo, it was bedtime again. What multitudes of childhood's chief delights have been interrupted by that inevitable hour! Bedtime always comes just at the most interesting stage and—presto, the game is ended. Even to the poor, gray-headed child of four-score it is ever the same—the last late bedtime finds him weary and heavy-eyed perhaps, but wakeful still and eager to play just a little while longer.

To Johnnie it was all blotted out in a strange, jumbled dream and a deep sleep. And on the morrow the sky was overcast, a dismal, drizzling rain was falling, and Christmas was a whole long year off!





XIII

THE PLOWMAN'S WEARY WAY

THE flowers on the hillside unfold no more gladly, no more trustfully, under the showers and sunshine of April than does the heart of boyhood. They are emblems of each other—youth and spring—and there is a kinship between them, an ancient kinship which it were necessary to return to the May time of creation to trace.

Springtime is ever generous and true to the boy. To him she sends her earliest greetings; to him her promises are most lavish, and to him she keeps them, every one. Signs of the approach of spring to which men are blind, tokens which the poet perceives not, are revealed to him.

What is the first unfailing harbinger of spring? Not the fickle bluebird that comes flashing down the fence, like an elusive bit of summer sky, nor the rash, uncertain crocus,

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struggling beneath the snow. Poetic symbols of spring they may be, but they prophesy nothing.

But the boy knows the old gray mare is inspired. One crisp morning he gallops her, bareback, up from the pasture and, on dismounting, finds his trousers' leg thickly frosted with her silver hair.


There is not a bird in sight, the landscape is dull and barren, but he has visible proof that spring is near.

Do not imagine that nature denies him her more subtle auguries, however. On the contrary, it is to the boy that the sunbeams bear their earliest messages, and the south wind seeks him first of all. The twitter of the pioneer robin is caught by his ear, and he notes the first faint "quank" of the flock of wild geese, pursuing its northward course across the unknown ocean of the upper air.

When at last spring comes creeping up the valley, the boy goes forth to meet her, and his heart leaps in unison with the glad pulses of universal life.

He is an artist beyond all bounds of art; a

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poet above the trammel of words; and, being such, he is content to gaze upon the landscape without analyzing it, and is satisfied with the perfume of the commonest flower. It is not simply the glimmer of reflected sunshine that delights him, not the mere external beauty of the fields and the balm of the gentle weather.

These are but harmonious incidents to the boy, for he communes with the vernal spirit of the season, he knows the true inner essence—that wondrous beauty of the heart of things, and he becomes an integral part of the landscape, blooming with the flowers, whistling with the birds, and exulting with all nature. And all the while he is as unconscious of this relationship, as spontaneous and irresponsible, as are the birds.

He finds a thrush's nest and robs it ruthlessly, while the thrush is away preying upon insect life. He tosses a careless clod at a chattering jay, which, in turn, proceeds to chase a flock of inoffensive sparrows out of the woods.

Perhaps this very wantonness of boy and bird is the secret of their exultation and enchantment.

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Yet, while leaf and blossom are but incidents of the season to the boy, he is the keenest of observers, and no detail escapes him. He is a naturalist, and a pantheist. The billowy verdure of the meadow impresses him, but no more than the vast minutiae of under-life beneath it.

Parting the grass, he becomes a gigantic member of the colony of ants, a fellow of the order of the grasshoppers, and a companion to the beetle and the snail. Entering the cloister of the forest, he is straightway a primeval druid.

He comes close to each phase of sylvan existence, climbing deftly to the upper haunts of birds and squirrels, and scraping beneath the leaves to find the hidden abode of grubs and "doodle-bugs." The caterpillar and the slug on the mossy side of tree-trunks and the busy spider, oscillating between two worlds, are familiar to him.

Wherever the boy goes he finds adequate expression of the season's gladness. Even the domestic denizens of the barnyard are found as vociferous in their joy as their cousins in the field. All day long the turkey-cock struts and

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gobbles in a passion of proud delight, throwing back a bubbling, half-challenging salute to every sound he hears, and, when all else fails, replying to his own ridiculous echo in jeer after jeer.

More sedate and sentimental, the chickens go ambling here and there with meditative cluckings and croonings, and occasional outbursts of wonder at the warmth of the sun and the plumpness of worms. The male of their tribe frequently lifts his voice in applause, and is inclined to all manner of levity, shocking the nervous hens into hysterics by announcing make-believe hawks, and creating general disgust by calling them all to a great feast and then laughingly eating every morsel himself.

The boy sees it all, and recognizes kindred spirits beneath down and feathers, and nature back of all.

It is only after spring has waxed into summer, and youth has waned into manhood, that the boy, having become a reflective being, and having lost that sixth sense of insight, becomes impressed unduly with the outward charm of things. Remembering the bygone happiness of

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spring and recalling its sweet symbols, he is apt to attribute the one to the other, knowing not, in the ignorance of maturity, that it was potential joy which brought forth bloom and song, and not they which caused the joy.

Johnnie had reached the mature age of thirteen when it was decided that instead of attending school during the spring, he must make a hand on the farm. It was one of the most joyful epochs in his life, and, in his memory, stood ever next to that proud day on which he donned his first pair of trousers.

As soon as the delightful decree had been pronounced, he stole out to the barn and secretly practised holding the plow-handles, which came almost to his armpits. The implement was jerked about manfully, while he urged his imaginary horses forward, swearing a little under his breath and expectorating between his teeth after the manner of the Hired Hand. This rehearsal he repeated daily until the season opened and plow-time was at hand.

What a glorious spring it was! Almost as far back as he could remember heretofore he had been compelled to start to school just as



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wild flowers and birds' nests were beginning to be seductively interesting. But that season he was free. Every morning he was the first one astir about the place, and there was an overflowing, liquid delight in his whistle that made the brown thrush pause and listen.

The eventful day came at last. Johnnie was to perform a man's work. With dignified tread he followed his plow into the new ground, thick with stumps, where his mettle was to be tested. It was severe and exasperating labor. The horses were stubborn, and the unwieldy plow was forever becoming entangled in the underground network of roots. At night Johnnie retired footsore and weary, and yet by no means disheartened or even disillusioned.

There was a wondrous, unforgettable charm for him in these first brief days of plow-time. The subtle odor of opening flowers and fresh foliage mingled with the mellow aroma of up-turned sod and the spicy incense of burning stumps and logs. Every cool breeze from the adjacent woods brought a multitude of merry songs and chirpings, while the eye was greeted





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on every hand by those delicate, velvety tints of green, of yellow, red, and blue, which belong only to the springtime.

In the midst of this bower of beauty walked Johnnie, doing a man's work. Perhaps after all it was the tremendous importance of this task as much as the charm of his surroundings which made him in love with the whole world.

When the full-blown summer came, however, it found him growing weary and restless, though he would not confess the fact, even to himself. Inwardly, almost unconsciously, he wished he could retire to his comfortable place at school for a while.

The sun had grown relentlessly hot, and the birds had gone so deep into the forest that their sleepy twittering was but barely audible. All the more dainty, modest flowers had shed their petals and succumbed to a host of coarse weeds, while lurking thorns and brambles lay everywhere in waiting to vex bare feet.

In the space of six weeks the corn had climbed up to Johnnie's shoulders, and through the long, lonely afternoons, as he followed the plow back

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and forth across the field, like a huge monotonous shuttle, weaving a vast woof of green and black, his courage and industry faltered sadly.

There was little rest to be found within the confines of the corn-field. As often as he halted his team and mounted the fence for a breathing spell, a swarm of flies and mosquitoes hovered round him, while a choir of tiny gnats sang a shrill falsetto in his ears.

The rainy day now came to be Johnnie's one great hope and consolation, and he kept an ever watchful eye on the weather. A cloud no bigger than his hand was greeted with satisfaction, and the rumble of distant thunder was music to him. And when a shower came slanting across the landscape, with what astonishing alacrity did he unhitch his horses and gallop to the barn.

There was no comfort in after-life to be compared to that which was his as he lolled in the mow and listened to the clatter of the rain on the clapboard roof above and the restful munching of the horses eating hay below.

"This here's a reg'lar ol' sockdolager!" observed Eph approvingly.

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"It'll make it too wet to plow, won't it?" asked Johnnie.

"Well, I should reckon," was the gratifying response. "Doubt if we don't git to plow no more this week."

Johnnie's eyes shone gleefully at this, and he involuntarily brought forth a tangle of fish-lines from his pocket. But just then the rain, after a cruelly reassuring dash, suddenly ceased. Johnnie hastened out. He scratched into the earth with his toes and found—dust at the depth of an inch!

The rainbow in the east was anything but a symbol of hope to him. The western sky was clearing, and with redoubled intensity the hot sun poured its rays upon the humid earth.

"Hurry back to the field, boys," called Mr. Winkle from the house; "this shower'll start the weeds agin."

At such a time the corn-field presented all the essentials of a Turkish bath. As Johnnie walked between the rows of corn, every blade of every stalk emptied a stream of warm water down his back, while the moist ground exhaled a palpable and penetrating steam.



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Sometimes it rained constantly for days together. Then was Johnnie thoroughly rejuvenated once more. He did not dread getting wet, when in pursuit of pleasure. In fact he seemed to revel and luxuriate in the rain, and, with trousers rolled high above his knees, dabbled up and down the creek like a young ichthyosaurus.

Continued wet spells were rare, however, long and withering droughts being much more frequent; and thus the summer days dragged on in tedious repetition, and the seasons came and went.

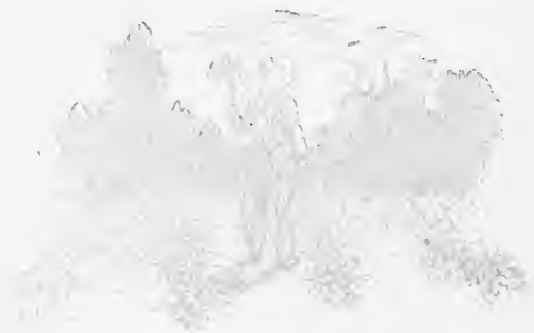
But even in the drudgery of plowing corn Johnnie was not entirely deserted by his dreams. Often fair visions wavered in the air about him, and in his ears there seemed to sound far strains of mystic music. Low down on the eastern horizon he noticed a dusky cloud of smoke which marked the site of the distant city.

As the years went by, this metropolitan specter acquired a fascination for Johnnie. Day after day he gazed at it dreamily as it drifted along, and every new fantastic shape it assumed seemed to beckon to him across the fields. An

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indefinable longing came over him, and, out of the immaterial smoke, his fancy built strange and wonderful air-castles.

Slowly the simple country life was losing its charm for him. The little world into which he had been born was growing too narrow to live in. He wondered how his father and his neighbors had borne such a barren existence. And slowly but surely, the half-formed wish became a fixed resolve. He would some day go to the city.





XIV

BUDDING

WHILE Johnnie's material world contracted, his intellectual outlook grew somewhat wider. As the hedge of forest which formed his horizon drew nearer, the mystery beyond it grew less dense. And yet, as things once strange became familiar, new wonders, undreamed of, came into view. Physically, spiritually, sentimentally Johnny was changing, was developing; yet this evolution was imperceptibly slow.

Each morning the same lad appeared at the Winkle breakfast table that had eaten supper there the night before; but each Christmas a bigger boy hung up his stocking, and every May-day greeted a comparative stranger.

Among the new and peculiar physical traits that his fourteenth summer brought him was a notable and ungainly lankness. His limbs approached the length and ungraceful contour of an anthropoid ape's, and came unjointed.

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Similarly strange mental characteristics were evinced. He became excessively shy and self-conscious, blushing more readily than of yore.

In fact Johnnie had reached that incongruous stage of youth of which the nonsensical term hobbledehoy is our only fitting appellation. Though still a boy, he was no longer a child; though approaching manhood, he was yet far from manhood's estate.

There is no way to describe and no way to account for the boy between the ages of twelve and sixteen. He is an anomaly—an inconsistent, illogical, indeterminate, improper fraction, with a variable numerator and an unknown denominator. No one understands him, and least of all does he understand himself.

When the girl arrives at womanhood's threshold, she simply does up her hair, lengthens her skirts, and trips gracefully in. But the boy is made to linger at manhood's door, awkwardly shifting his feet, for an indefinite period.

Among the legion of unstable, quixotic qualities which go to make up the hobbledehoy, there is one nearly constant and always significant.



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This is his novel and reverential admiration for womankind. Heretofore Johnnie had formed certain boyish attachments for particular girls, usually greatly his seniors, but, for the sex in general, he had a supreme contempt.

Girls, as he had observed them, were weak and cowardly and inclined to be goody-goodies and tattle-tales. But now, by some strange miracle, the scales had dropped from his eyes, and, whichever way he turned, he seemed to find new phases of feminine beauty. Maidens with whom he had played and quarreled all his life began to wear halos. Freckled faces shone with lily-whiteness, snub noses assumed graceful outlines, and brown eyes and blue were alike beautiful and bright.

Perhaps this transformation was not altogether fancied—no doubt the girl-buds of his own age were beginning to unfold a little pretentious color here and there; but chiefly it was a subjective illusion, and in its effects it was purely, nay, painfully such.

Johnnie's very meditations grew altered. Plans for the remote future were relinquished in favor of more immediate accomplishments. He

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became concerned not so much with what he should do when he became a man as what he should do next week. Such trivial, temporal matters as dress commanded his attention, and he took to washing his face and hands voluntarily. On Sunday afternoons he went no more into the depths of the forest, but lolled listlessly at its verge.

Gradually his day-dreams accustomed themselves largely to the sweet theme of love, and out of odd fragments of experience and fancy an ideal of feminine loveliness was formed in his breast.

Johnnie was altogether unconscious of this creative process, and scarcely recognized the import of his brooding. But, with the lengthening of his legs and arms, with the expanding of his mentality and the augmentation of his awkwardness, the ideal grew.

When one day fate—if fate may be truly said to interest herself with such affairs—brought the dreamy boy into contact with Miss Mabel Meadows, the queenly twelve-year-old daughter of the new neighbor who had purchased the Shanks' place, straightway the sub-

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tile, shadowy ideal became a living, palpitating reality.

It happened in a properly romantic way. Johnnie was roving through the woods knight-errantly in search of adventure and his father's cows, when he was startled to hear a sudden cry of alarm near at hand. Parting the hazel brush, he beheld a very pale, very young lady, apparently paralyzed with fear, and a very small garter-snake in a similar state, staring fixedly at each other.

Johnnie did not know the girl, and hesitated to announce himself without having had an introduction; but the snake presently started to wriggle away, and it was against the vows of his order to permit a snake to escape. So he charged gallantly through the brush, and in another moment was holding the squirming reptile at arm's length by the tail.

"Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!" shrieked the young lady.

"What are you 'fraid of?" asked Johnnie, grinning. "Think it's pizen?"

"Oh, the horrid thing!" cried she.

"Just watch me settle its hash," said Johnnie fearlessly; and amid renewed screams on the

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girl's part, he proceeded to lash the hapless serpent against a tree.

"Now I guess it won't scare no more girls," he remarked, tossing it to the ground.

But the girl had begun to sob piteously, and this disturbed Johnnie. He stared at her a few moments and then observed doubtfully:

"It wasn't a pet snake, was it?"

"O dear, no," she murmured. "It was wild, and was goin' to bite me if—if you hadn't come."

Johnnie could not restrain a smile of derision.

"Aw, it wouldn't bite a flea," said he. "It ain't that kind. Say, I'm goin' to turn it on its back, so it'll rain. If you leave a snake on its—its stomick it won't rain at all."

"What kind is it?" asked the girl, coming nearer.

"Oh, it's a common enough kind," he answered evasively. He did not like to tell her its rather indelicate name.

"Yes, but what kind?" she persisted.

"Aw, what you hold your stockin's up with," he stammered, blushing violently.

"Oh," said she. Then there was an awkward

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silence, during which the girl glanced shyly at Johnnie, and Johnnie gazed at the dead snake.

"What's your name?" she asked presently, toying with her apron.

"John Winkle," said he sheepishly. "What's yours?"

"My name is Mabel—Mabel Meadows," she responded.

Another pause ensued, and the girl carefully adjusted her bonnet.

Then, "Good by, John," she exclaimed, turning upon him with a sudden radiant smile; and, with fairy-like lightness and grace, she drifted away.

"Good by, Mabel," answered Johnnie hoarsely, when he had recovered his voice. But she was gone.

A soft golden gleam illumined the woods, and a vernal odor, as of fresh-blown violets, permeated the air. A dove in a distant treetop nodded approvingly and gave voice to the tender sentiments welling up in the heart of all nature in mellifluous coo after coo. And, although Johnnie seemed oblivious of these circumstances now, many a time afterward he re-



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called every detail with distinctness. For months to come he never heard the moaning of a dove, nor killed a snake, without thinking of the day he first met Mabel.

How long he lingered on this hallowed spot he knew not; but at length he roused from the reverie, and, taking up the snake as a memento of the occasion, started home. He was still so absorbed in thought that the cows were forgotten, and it was not until he entered the barnyard bearing his reptilian treasure that his wits returned.

Henceforth Mabel Meadows was the angel of Johnnie's dreams. He remembered her in his prayers and thought of her whenever tempted to rob a bird's nest or to swear.

It is an instinct of the hobbledchoy to conceal his ardent passion religiously. He will allow it to eat his heart, will suffer upon the rack, and not reveal it. And the principal cause of this secretiveness is not really the sacred nature of his love, nor a tendency to be selfish, but the haunting fear of being made fun of.

A boy would rather be lashed with a cat-o'-nine-tails than be laughed at.



JOHNNIE

No murderer ever guarded his crime more scrupulously than did Johnnie conceal his love. He mentioned Mabel's name to no one, and did not even permit himself to think of her except when alone.

One day when Mr. Meadows came to see his father, Johnnie ran and hid for fear his secret might in some way be discovered, afterwards asking Eph who the visitor was, as if he had no idea.

When school opened that fall Johnnie started in a fever of expectancy. All the way he argued with himself pro and con, as to whether Mabel would be likely to be there, and formulated a careful schedule of what his behavior should be in either case. How his heart thumped as he drew near and beheld her standing alone on the stile!

But a group of boys sat on the fence not far away, and, banishing all former plans, Johnnie suddenly resolved not to know her. That seemed to be the only outlet of escape from his mates' ridicule.

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Assuming an air of easy carelessness, he sauntered on.

"Howd'y, John," whispered the girl as he brushed past her.

Johnnie's face flushed, and his heart beat so loudly that he had no doubt she heard it, but he offered no sign of recognition.

This apparently unprovoked slight cut Mabel to the quick. Yet, if she had only known it, Johnnie was wounded much more seriously than she.

"If she but knew—" he whispered to himself week after week. But he could no more tell her than if he had been born dumb.



XV

THE BANE OF BASHFULNESS

OF all the phenomena of boyhood, perhaps, the state of being bashful is the most ridiculous and, subjectively, the most rueful. It is the fate of most boys to pass through a more or less prolonged period of bashfulness; but, like the measles and mumps, it is an affliction which varies greatly in different individuals. It is probable that in extreme cases it has suppressed and ruined what might have been brilliant careers; that Miltons have been rendered forever mute and inglorious by its bane.

Now and then a boy is found whose bashfulness is so pronounced that his freckles stand out on a facial background of continuous blushes, like flecks of rust on a red apple; and his eyes, which really have less cause to be downcast than the optics of any of his elders, are constantly averted, so that their color is a matter of conjecture.

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Such a boy is simply a ruddy, palpitating bundle of mortification. He is never at ease, never his natural self, save when alone. He is always making ludicrous blunders, and is always painfully aware of them. The knowledge that he is bashful tortures him; and this self-consciousness in turn serves to render his bashfulness more intense. Wherever he goes he is a self-imposed martyr, refraining from activity for fear of attracting notice, his studied efforts to keep in the background all the while making him conspicuous.

Johnnie Winkle, who had been at different periods a good boy, a cute boy, a pert boy, a mischievous and sometimes a bad boy, became known far and wide as a bashful boy. He was confessedly afraid of girls. Other boys whom he could outrun, outjump, spell down, and thrash, easily surpassed him in grace and gallantry. Every recess friends and enemies of his joined the girls in gay games of forfeit and Rowser without embarrassment. Yet he could not even address a coherent remark to a girl. It was a lamentable, woeful weakness to a boy of Johnnie's spirits. He lay awake of nights heap-

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ing imprecations upon it, and resolved to do all sorts of dreadful things.

What especially tortured him was the sorry figure he continued to cut in Mabel Meadows' eyes. From the fateful day on which he had deliberately insulted her by refusing to acknowledge her acquaintance, she had quite properly ignored his existence. Moreover, of late she had become great friends with Reddy. Johnnie had licked Reddy and could do it again any day; but in social matters the tables were turned. Reddy, alias Jimmy Jenks, when he reached the age at which he ought to have been bashful, had become more forward and pig-gishly presumptuous than ever.

Altogether the unfortunate state of affairs humiliated Johnnie to the verge of desperation. Jealousy of one whom he had always held in the utmost contempt was added to his pangs.

In the course of time a party was announced at Mabel's, and Johnnie was invited. With a solemn oath he declared his intention to go. Not only would he attend the party, but he would take active part in the games, and be a man, so help him! It had come to this. He

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must either do or die—or both. The eventful night was not slow in coming; in fact, it came with a swiftness that was terrifying. But Johnnie remained firm. Early in the evening he dressed and sallied forth.

He approached the house stealthily from the rear with scarcely a tremor. He knew he would not go in, for it was hours too early yet. Seating himself on the fence he fondly watched the house, which held his beloved, fade away in the dusk.

At length, lights began to shine at windows, and he heard voices in the yard. Growing panicky he slipped down and crept back into the woods. There a fierce battle was waged in his breast. Pride kept saying over and over, "I will go in"; but as soon as he reached the fence again timidity would make a sudden charge and say firmly, "I won't go in."

After repeated routs, rallies, and flank movements, however, pride won the day—or rather, the night—and Johnnie found himself at the party.

He marched in boldly and flung himself into the thick of the merriment, laughing and chat-



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tering until some were made to believe that he was having a good time. But, alas, it was only by sheer force of will that he assumed to be at ease, and the feeling grew upon him that he was talking stupidly, laughing idiotically, and acting the fool.

The strain was too great, and in the midst of it all Johnnie broke down. The tide of bashfulness came surging back upon him, sweeping him off his feet. He dropped out of the game, murmured something about going home, and began peeping about under sofas and chairs in an aimless way until Mabel asked: "Why, what is the matter, John?"

"Oh, I was just looking round," he replied carelessly. "I wonder where my hat is."

"It's on the rack in the hall, isn't it?" suggested Mabel. Then she ran and got it. "Must you really go?" she asked anxiously.

Johnnie would not hurt her feelings for the world.

"Oh, no; I guess I'll wait a while yet," he answered obligingly. "I just wanted my hat," and he laughed vacantly.

"Fraid somebody 'd steal it?" suggested

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Reddy, elbowing by with a smirk; and Johnnie was too shamed even to resent his rival's insolence.

For the rest of the evening he stood around engaged in clinging to his hat and blushing. He would have gone home—he would rather have gone home than to heaven—but one insurmountable obstacle lay in his way. Etiquette, that constant plague of bashful boyhood, required that he should thank his hostess for the pleasures of the evening before departing; and this he could not do.

So he lingered on, like the boy on the burning deck, and in much the same state of mind, until “all but him had fled.”

As the others spoke their polite farewells, he had listened intently to each formula, and he decided that he would say:

“I assure you, Miss Mabel, I have had a delightful time.”

Drawing himself up in line at last he began: “I have had an assuring time—I mean I’m delightful, Miss Mabel,” he stammered, gazing yearningly at the door-knob.

“Thank you,” said Mabel, courteously.

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"Oh, not at all, I'm sure," rejoined Johnnie affably, grinding his teeth; then: "Well, I guess I'd better be going."

"Really?" smiled Mabel.

"I think I'd better; it's getting late."

"Yes."

He had reached the door and, having exhausted all his powers of conversation, was staring awkwardly at the floor when he heard Reddy's well-known voice at a window.

"Aw, come off!" it exclaimed, derisively; and with murder in his heart Johnnie rushed wildly out.

This was all very amusing, or harrowing, according to the point of view. To the malicious Reddy it was funny; to Johnnie it was simply calamitous. Not being a natural fool he realized his folly, and indeed magnified it to terrible dimensions.

All the way home in fancy he could hear Mabel and Reddy making merry together over his stupidity, till the very welkin rang with their mockful laugh. With every step he muttered an evil, "Dog-gone it; dog-gone it." There were no stars in the sky, no dew was on the grass—

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the world was an immense mass of darkness whirling through a universe of gloomy, gray mist; and life was the emptiest of idle dreams.

Sadly he stole up to his bedchamber—his cheerless bedchamber, from which he had gone forth so full of hope, of vaunting pride and fond ambition a few brief hours before. Sadly he tumbled into bed, and with his last waking breath sighed soulfully again, “Dog-gone it.”

Johnnie resolved never to venture upon the social sea again. Never would he expose himself to the taunts of his inferiors and the ridicule of dear Mabel any more. Evidently nature had not fitted him to shine in company. And what was the use of opposing nature’s unalterable plans?

His lot was to be that of the recluse. So be it. He would retire meekly to the lonely depths of the forest and become a hermit, living sparsely and broken-heartedly upon nuts and herbs. Man he would shun, and the face of woman he would never look upon again. The four-footed and feathered folk of the woods should be his only friends.

He planned how he would build himself a

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nest in the top of a giant oak, where the winds would rock him to sleep, while the silent stars watched above him, and the wretched world unwept sank out of sight.

Day after day he would awaken ere the sun, and, descending from his high abode, gather his scant supply of food with the squirrels, to scamper aloft again before sluggard humanity stirred.

If, at any time, his serenity should be disturbed by a human presence, if some girl—as Mabel, for instance—should chance to stray within the boundaries of his realm, how haughtily he would stare down at her through the foliage! And if she should happen to lift her eyes and see him as he swung airily from bough to bough, if a look of anguished longing should overspread her face, if she should break forth in remorseful lamentations and beg him to come back, come back to her—well, his voice would tremble, maybe, and his eyes might grow misty; but he would answer her calmly, tenderly but firmly: “It is too late, Mabel; alas, too late.”

Johnnie, furthermore, decided as to how he would dispose of Reddy if he ever came across

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his path; and the foreordained treatment of that worthy, while less poetical, was fully as gratifying as his imaginary interview with Mabel.





XVI

THE RALLY

IT was on a Saturday afternoon late in October that Johnnie went into the woods in a half-fanciful search for his destined lone retreat. Whether under guidance of his dreaming consciousness, or directed by the unerring hand of fate, it happened that his steps led him to the very spot where he and Mabel had met some months before.

He was not slow to recognize his surroundings, and, racked by contending emotions, he threw himself on the ground to meditate. Reclining listlessly on his elbow, he gazed about. Here was where the snake had been; over there was where Mabel had stood. The screen of hazel through which he had peered still inclosed the cherished nook. The same trees arched above, the same grass formed its carpet.

And yet nothing was the same after all. Already time's most ruthless token, the yellow

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blight of autumn, was becoming visible everywhere. Bleak winds came and went mournfully through the tree-tops, filling the forest with the clatter of descending nuts and the flutter of falling leaves, and the grass was harsh and withered, retaining scarcely more of its former color than the flecks of sodden sky above.

To Johnnie this universal fading of things seemed most fitting, and his own breast heaved with sighs with every moan of the forest. He was, indeed, the very embodiment of the autumnal spirit.

The morbid melancholy of boyhood is a painful thing. The height of sentimental spirituality, to which lovelorn youth oftentimes ascends, would be sublime, were it not so ridiculous.

In the midst of his maunderings Johnnie became aware of a presence, and, starting up in confusion, whom should he behold but the fair Mabel herself, standing with downcast eyes and folded hands before him!

"Howd'y, John," she said, demurely stepping forward.

"Howd'y," gasped Johnnie, with pallid face and averted eyes.

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"What you doing? Hunting snakes?" asked Mabel, after waiting a moment for him to say something.

"No'p," responded Johnnie glumly, edging away. Then a thought struck him.

"Only red-headed ones," he added with terse meaning.

"What do you mean?"

"You're awful innocent."

"Honest, I don't understand you."

"Who was you looking for, then?" accusingly.

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"I wasn't looking for anybody particular," with blushes.

"Whereabouts is Reddy?" and Johnnie faced her sternly.

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"Yes, you don't—" very sarcastically.

"That red-headed thing!" with great disdain.

"You like him, don't you?"—this somewhat softly.

Mabel replied with a decisiveness which made Johnnie's heart bound, "No, I don't!"

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During the silence that followed Johnnie picked up a stick and began poking into the ground thoughtfully.

"I hate him!" exclaimed Mabel vehemently.

"So do I," responded Johnnie, with feeling.

"Say," began Mabel after another pause.

"Say what?"

"I'm not going to have a thing to do with him any more."

"I wouldn't either," said Johnnie sympathetically.

Then Mabel drew shyly nearer, and Johnnie stood his ground, though his brain was reeling.

"I—I like you the best," she whispered, glancing up at him.

A visible thrill passed over Johnnie from head to foot, and he was stricken speechless. He wanted to answer her fittingly, he wanted to caress her, he wanted to turn a glad flip-flop on the grass; but he could only stand there and poke the stick furiously into the ground.

"This is the same place where we first met," began Mabel again presently. "I have thought of it so often. You can't guess how I happened to come here to-day, John." She paused.

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"No'p," said he.

"I saw you and followed you."

Johnnie's brain reeled again. Was this a deceitful dream?

Was he sleeping, and would he presently awake? Was the wind still sobbing, and were the dead leaves falling? No, surely it was summer time again.

"I'm glad," he murmured dreamily at length, speaking the truth that was uppermost in his heart.

Mabel looked up and laughed; then a shade of vexation came into her face.

"But why do you snub me at school, John?" she asked earnestly.

"Because—Oh, just because," said he in confusion again.

"Do you like me?"

"Yes—awful," then, drawing himself together with sudden force, "I'm 'fraid of the teacher."

The conversation became less personal at length, but to Johnnie no less interesting. Nothing she could say lacked interest.

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Finally the lateness of the afternoon forced them to part.

"Don't you ever tell about this," warned Johnnie, as he started away; and again when he had gone a little distance he stopped, and turning round repeated, "Don't you ever tell!"

And the joyous little bird-voice echoed back sweetly, "I won't, John," and, tenderly, "Good by!"

When Johnnie reached home that evening he seemed so profoundly happy that his mother cross-examined him closely, fearing he had been into mischief. He became suspiciously embarrassed, too, under her questions; but all she could get out of him was that he had been in the woods.

The fiercest inquisition of old could never have extorted from Johnnie the secret of his tryst with Mabel.

Swiftly and happily Johnnie relinquished his dreams of a lodge in the wilderness. There was a new and notable manliness in his bearing and a proud gleam in his eye when he appeared at school Monday morning.

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The knowledge that Mabel liked him—cared for him (he could not quite bring himself to use the word love)—had wrought a revolution in his every relationship. Although by no means blind to his blunders and awkwardness, the fact that such a critic as Mabel did not deem him altogether stupid reassured him, and self-assurance was what he most needed.

At recess a game of Weevily Wheat was begun under the locusts in the school-yard. With his accustomed freshness Reddy sauntered up to Mabel, and, taking her familiarly by the arm, boldly declared that she should be his partner. But Mabel shook him off haughtily, and a moment later was tripping through the mazes of the game (which was really a sort of quadrille, although the children did not know it) as Johnnie Winkle's chosen mate.

Reddy went and leaned against a tree and made taunting comments upon them.

"Ain't he a dandy?" and "See the periwinkle!" and "Keep off her feet, won't you?" he cried spitefully.

When the set was concluded Johnnie stepped aside and beckoned Reddy to follow. Reddy



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acquiesced with an easy air, destined soon to vanish.

The back fence was reached, and Johnnie took his whilom rival by the ear.

"See here, Reddy," he began impressively, "I've got a notion to wallup the daylights out of you."

Reddy squirmed and his florid face grew as pale as it could.

"You're a dog-goned little pup, an' you got to let Mabel alone. D'ye understand?" Johnnie went on, placing a fist beneath Reddy's nose.

"Why, I don't want to bother her," quaked Reddy. "I don't care nothin' about her—if she'll let me be. She ain't—"

"Shut up!" commanded Johnnie sharply. "Don't you dare say nothin' about her."

"Why, course I won't. Say, John," and Reddy became effusively confidential, "I bet you can't guess what she said about you." And before Johnnie could interrupt him: "She said she thought you was the nicest boy in this school—honest, she did, an' I can prove it."

This information had the desired effect of appeasing the avenger's wrath somewhat; and

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when the bell rang the unpleasant affair had been amicably settled.

Thenceforth Johnnie and Mabel became acknowledged and *bona-fide* school sweethearts. Their passion was largely of the passive, pensive sort, evincing itself not so much in language as in smiles, and sighs, and longing, in exaltation, and melancholia, and loss of appetite.

In truth, their love was of the kind which certain old people, who have never been young, are wont to style "puppy-love,"—the kind which, to one who perceives the heart of things, is the purest, most divine, and, not seldom, the most enduring form of affection.

To Johnnie's innocent imagination Mabel was simply a hallowed angel, while in her eyes he assumed the aspect of a hero, capable of all things noble and good.

Nor is it likely that their estimates of each other in the abstract ever came nearer the truth; for, just as they were then, in all their childish innocence and ignorance, their youthful delicacy and maidenly reserve, were they not happier and better and wiser than most of their supercilious elders, or than they themselves might ever be again?



XVII

A SORROWFUL DENOUEMENT

ONE of the fresh snows of midwinter had fallen, and Johnnie was searching for the ax preparatory to going rabbit hunting, when he noticed his father and Mr. Meadows conversing earnestly together in the orchard lot, back of the barn.

Mr. Meadows was a highly interesting man to Johnnie, and, although he always felt rather ill at ease in so august a presence, he decided he would like to hear what was being said.

So, strolling carelessly into their vicinity, he stopped at a peach-tree and began to pick the withered buds to pieces with great pains, under pretense of ascertaining whether they had been winter-killed.

"Yes, it is a poor time to move," Mr. Meadows was saying, "but you see it's a chance I can't let slip. I make a clean thousand to start with, and fair prospects for more."

JOHNNIE

"When do you go?" asked Mr. Winkle.

"Three weeks from Tuesday, if nothing happens."

Then they walked off, and presently Mr. Meadows went home.

Johnnie crept away. He had heard enough—more than enough. All the time he had felt that something was going to happen; and this was it. Mabel was going away. Going away, and he would never see her again.

What a sad, sodden, snow-bound world it was! He went and climbed into the haymow, where he could nurse his misery undisturbed.

"Well, what on airth air ye doin' here, sonny?" cried Eph in amazement when he came at noon to feed the horses. "We all thought ye wuz out chasin' cotton-tails."

"No'p," said Johnnie dolefully, "I ain't feeling well, Eph."

"Well, Lord, why don't ye go to the house then. Ye'll ketch yer death out here," and under a stream of reproof Johnnie slunk out.

At dinner his lack of appetite confirmed the assertion that he was not well. But he remained at the table throughout the meal and, after re-

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peated attempts, finally succeeded in leading his father to discuss the topic uppermost in his mind and deepest in his heart.

"Meadowses are going to move away," said Mr. Winkle across the table to his wife; and he proceeded to explain the whys and wherefores of the case, whilst Johnnie unwittingly gulped down great crusts of bread.

The next day, which was Sunday, was very long and lonesome. As evening drew on Johnnie became uncontrollably restless and finally stole upstairs and put on his best suit of clothes.

Ere long he might have been seen speeding across lots, like a shadow in the dusk, toward the Meadows place. He was going to pay Mabel a call. All the way he wondered at himself and could hardly believe it. He would almost have wagered that he was only shamming and would not actually go up and knock at the door when he got there. But, even while turning the matter over in his mind, he had reached the gate, had stepped boldly on to the porch, and was rapping on the door, with a vicious little rat-terrier snapping at his heels.

Presently a tall, matronly woman, with huge



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spectacles, opened the door and peered out into the night.

"Good night, ma'am," said Johnnie, removing his hat.

The woman stared at him.

"Whose boy are you?" she asked at length.

"I'm John Winkle," responded Johnnie in as deep a bass as he could summon.

"Oh—Sam Winkle's boy, eh? Is some one sick?" Johnnie replied in the negative, and was finally invited in.

Ah, what a little boy he felt himself to be! He had left home with a feeling of manliness, rejoicing in his strength, but now, as he placed himself precariously on the edge of an upholstered chair, he realized how vainly he had vaunted.

Wistfully he looked about. Mabel was nowhere in sight.

"My little boy, Willie, has gone to bed," observed Mrs. Meadows apologetically. "I'll see if he is asleep," and she withdrew.

Her little boy, Willie! A wholly uninteresting infant, a mere babe of ten—what did Johnnie care for him?

'A SORROWFUL DENOUEMENT'

"Willie is fast asleep," said his motherly hostess when she came back, "but here are some of his picture-books. Perhaps you'd like to look at them," and she deposited a gaudy collection of juvenile literature in his lap.

To think he had come to call on a little boy, and then to bring him picture-books—this was indeed adding insult to injury. But she was Mabel's mother, and Johnnie dared not reveal his disgust.

Patiently he turned the pages of the child's books, pausing now and then as though particularly pleased with certain passages.

In the meantime Mrs. Meadows sat near by reading a newspaper and looking up occasionally to see how her young guest enjoyed himself.

For a long while Johnnie perused the books industriously in the hope that somehow Mabel would appear soon. But when the clock struck eight, and every variegated volume had been exhausted, he grew despondent.

He rose to his feet.

"I'll have to be going," he said dejectedly. As he reached the door he asked abruptly:



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"How many children have you got, Mrs. Meadows?"

"Just two—Willie and Mabel," she answered pleasantly. "You haven't any little brothers or sisters, have you?"

"No'm."

"Poor child! I suppose you get lonesome. You ought to come over and play with Willie often. But we're going to move away soon."

At this juncture an inner door opened, and Mabel appeared, sleepy-eyed and yawning, with a copy of *Ivanhoe* in her hand.

"Why, John Winkle," she cried in surprise, "what's the matter?"

Johnnie tried to inform her that nothing was the matter.

"I've just been visiting your ma," he explained, smiling helplessly.

He was already on the porch. He had started home, and could not well turn back now. Cordial good nights were spoken all around, and he took his departure. But he lingered at the gate long enough to hear Mabel asking her mother in vexation: "Why didn't you tell me he was here?"





A SORROWFUL DENOUEMENT

She had been upstairs calmly reading all evening!

Mabel was not at school the next morning, nor the next, nor any morning thereafter. Her father came one day and got her books, saying that, as they were going away in a short time, it was not worth while for Mabel to attend school during the interval.

With her books went his last ray of sunshine. Dismal, indeed, were the long days after that. Johnnie occupied the time with various vain subterfuges. He wrote endearing letters to her, which he carried about and then finally destroyed. He found a pencil in her deserted desk, overlooked by her father, and wore it near his heart. He composed little odes and sonnets of which she was the central thought, and in which occurred such rhymes as "fair" and "golden hair," "eyes" and "skies," "love" and "above,"—rhymes which have been utilized over and over by languishing lovers since poetry and love were first invented.

He went to the woods in the cheerless weather and seeking out their olden trysting-place



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carved her initials and his own on the trunk of an ice-bound tree that faithfully guarded the hallowed spot.

He loitered sometimes in the vicinity of Mabel's home, but he did not venture in any more.

Early one morning, while the dawn was yet dim on the snowy fields, Johnnie was awakened by the rumble of heavy wagons passing along the road. Instinctively he ran to the window and peeped out. The Meadowses were moving! Four wagons, heaped with household goods, upon the foremost of which rode Mr. Meadows, told the tragic tale.

With a sinking heart Johnnie watched them pass. No funeral procession had ever impressed him as did this.

Upon the last wagon, wrapped in comforts and shawls, sat Mabel, his beloved. She gave no sign of recognition—she did not even seem to look in Johnnie's direction. Once, indeed, he thought she turned her head slightly, but that was all.

Slowly the shadows enfolded her form—slowly, as divine visions ever fade, she passed from sight; and sadly, as all music dies, the rumble of the heavy wagons ceased.





XVIII

A BOOK WORM

THE boy is a mercurial being. Specialists tell us that the slightest systemic disturbance is apt to throw a child into fever, while a disorder which would produce a mere chill in an adult is sufficient to cause infantile convulsions.

On the other hand, the child is remarkably responsive to remedial measures, and, the cause being removed, reacts from the gravest illness promptly and completely. Anatomically the boy's bones and sinews possess more fibrous tissue and less calcium than the man's. And his temperament, like his bones, is much more supple and elastic.

The troubles of childhood, although intense, are fleet, as is childhood itself. A disappointment that would crush hope out of a man's life forever, oppresses the boy for about a month.

Johnnie was profoundly affected by Mabel's departure for the space of several weeks. Dur-

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ing this unhappy period he sought consolation in various futile ways. On Saturday mornings, after chores, he would shoulder the musket—for he had become old enough to bear arms now—and go hunting; but his path always led to one certain sylvan retreat, and he came home down-cast and empty-handed.

Then he would chop stove-wood diligently all the afternoon, striving to drown grief in the dissipation of work, but in vain.

At school he would play wildly one day, quarrel and fight the next, and mope moodily apart on the day after.

But one great solace gradually came to chasten his sorrow. As often happens, it was the very alternative which at first seemed to promise the least. In aimlessness he began to investigate the dust-embalmed books in his father's meager library.

It was a heterogeneous collection, comprising the History of the Reformation, Flavius Josephus, The Family Doctor, and Saints' Rest, among its heavier works. In somewhat lighter vein were Oliver Twist, two autograph albums, Waverley, the Language of Flowers, the Agri-

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cultural Reports, and an Atlas of the World. Furthermore, in a corner to themselves, Johnnie found his own forgotten prize-copy of Paradise Lost and a much traveled Pilgrim's Progress.


In any other mood Johnnie would have scorned these musty, old-fogy volumes as mere empty rubbish, belonging altogether beyond the pale of his existence. But their very forlornness appealed to him now, and the ancient odor of sanctity which they literally exhaled seemed to soothe and tranquilize his soul.

They were, indeed, spiritualized books, from which all carnal attributes had faded generations before; and Johnnie felt himself strangely akin to them.

The impression arose slowly from their outward appearance. As to their contents, he had read twenty pages of the Reformation before he was even vaguely conscious of their import; and he continued to read more for the sake of turning the yellow leaves and smelling their inspiring odor there in the restful quiet of the parlor than for any interest the history bore.

In like manner he loitered through Flavius

JOHNNIE



Josephus and the Family Doctor. But when he had perused the first chapter of *Oliver Twist* his lethargy vanished. Like an Egyptologist who, delving day after day amid the very attenuation of mummified death, comes suddenly face to face with some quaintly familiar phase of life, so Johnnie discovered the grotesquely vivid characters of Dickens. He read the book through twice before he could put it aside.

Thereafter Johnnie became a discriminating reader. He lingered somewhat over the many-tinted but time-stained leaves of the autograph albums, dainty forget-me-nots of his parents' youths, with their mellow verses in almost invisible chirography praying remembrance and signed by hands long folded across throbless breasts,—he lingered over these, with wonder at the strain of pathos which they revealed, so like that of his own life, and which he had not believed existed in the good old times. But much more burning was his interest in Scott's glowing romance, so replete with stirring life and love and all the bright ideals, toward which a boy's heart yearns.

To Johnnie, *Waverley* was intensely realistic,

A BOOK WORM

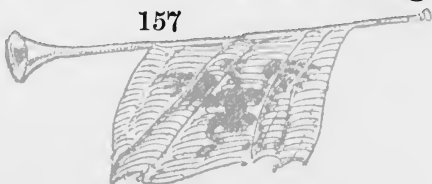
for he had not yet descended in spirit to the low level of ordinary existence, where the expected happens, and the rain falls monotonously on the just and on the unjust.

Waverley was grand, and ere he had finished it his entire mental attitude and the atmosphere about him had changed again. Depression had been displaced by a lofty buoyant longing for great adventure. His imaginary world had become a vast battle-ground of mighty heroes, with countless lovely maidens looking on and crowning the victors with laurel wreaths.

His heart swelled to be up and doing; and his dreams grew more extravagant than they had ever been before.

Nor were his aspirations satisfied with make-believes as they had been in the past. He tried to pretend that old Fan was a prancing palfrey, as she ambled across the pasture with him, that his clothes were glittering armor, and his hat a helmet; but fancy was not equal to it. He charged upon the cows as adversaries with a mullein-stalk lance; but they only eyed him reproachfully and switched their tails.

Discouraged by the perverseness of things,



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Johnnie returned to the library again. *Saints' Rest* aroused little enthusiasm; and he was somewhat wary of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

But when he stripped the latter of its allegorical elements and learned to omit the dissertations between Christian and his garrulous companions, he found it very good reading.

The Slough of Despond was to him a miry marsh, like that in his father's meadow; Doubting Castle was a huge, jail-like edifice; and the Valley of the Shadow of Death was a deep, gloomy gorge. Great Heart was a real, flesh-and-blood man, whose lineaments fancy graphically traced; and the giant Despair was a counterpart of Goliath. The fiery battle with Apollyon was a vivid and war-like engagement, surpassing any Scott had depicted.

Johnnie was at just the right age to get the meat out of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

But, at length, the family library was exhausted. Every volume had been reviewed, even to the atlas. With an unquenchable thirst for more fiction, Johnnie consulted Cousin Henry. Cousin Henry, he knew, was an inveterate reader of stories.

A BOOK WORM

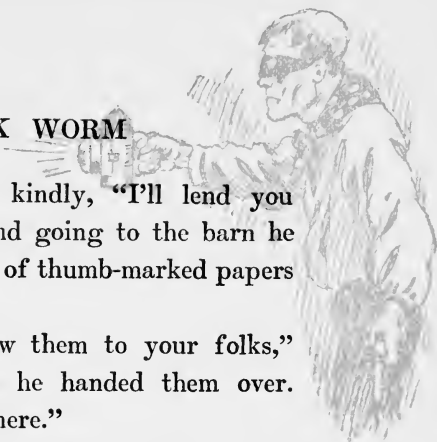
"Yes," said Henry kindly, "I'll lend you something to read"; and going to the barn he brought forth a bundle of thumb-marked papers from a secret niche.

"But don't you show them to your folks," Henry admonished, as he handed them over. "Keep them hid somewhere."

With a somewhat guilty feeling Johnnie bore the papers home and, stealing into his father's barn, stored them away in the loft. Here, he thought, was food that would be filling at any rate.

Sunday afternoon he began their secret perusal. They were story papers with a vengeance. The Human Sleuth! was the scare-head title of the first tale Johnnie's eyes fell upon; and he was soon following the famous detective with bated breath through adventures before which those of Christian paled.

It was the kind of literature which at some time falls into the hands of every youth, and turns the heads of so many; the bloody, microbe-infested kind, produced by anemic, narrow-chested individuals, coughing themselves to death in city garrets.



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For several weeks Johnnie breathed this infected air, cuddled up in the haymow, in close seclusion.

But one day Eph ascended to his retreat un-awares and, with his usual sensible instinct, took in the situation at a glance.

"Hold on there, sonny," he said, going directly to the point. "Ye'd better be out playin' cyards, er stealin' hogs, er plottin' to kill yore gran'mammy than readin' that there truck; it'll land ye in jail, shore. I've been there—I mean I've been where you air; an' I come purty clost to the jail, too."

With admonitions and precepts too tedious to relate, Eph plied Johnnie for an hour.

Next day the story papers were returned to their owner. Eph congratulated himself on the good deed he had done, in thus persuading Johnnie to abandon the pernicious stuff; but, in truth, the fierce Human Sleuth had already grown repugnant. The boy who has tasted Dickens and Scott—not to mention the History of the Reformation—is apt soon to tire of so insipid a mental diet.



XIX

THE BOY INVENTOR

DURING that intensely adolescent stage, between twelve and sixteen, the boy is a many-sided individual. In pursuing the tangled thread of sentiment through this mazy period, it must not be assumed that Johnnie was given altogether to idle dreams of love. It would be vain to attempt to touch upon all the phases he exhibited. Their number was legion, their manifestations countless.

One of the most persistent characteristics was a faculty for inventing. This amounted almost to genius; indeed his parents were inclined to consider it positively phenomenal.

At the tender age of nine he had torn a clock to pieces and put it together again so that it would run with amazing speed. His mother's sewing-machine was thoroughly overhauled by him when he was ten; and at the age of twelve he attempted to make a steam thresher out of an

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old washing-machine. All one summer he labored at odd times trying to transform a tin can into a locomotive.

He whittled a whirligig out of a shingle, whose mechanism made a wooden bird bob up and down; and the toy wagons, sets of dog harness, chicken coops, and martin boxes he constructed were innumerable.

Some of Johnnie's devices were carefully planned in advance; but often he depended wholly on inspiration, simply taking saw and hammer and going to work, letting the plans develop as he proceeded. Frequently he had no idea what his invention would prove to be until it was finished.

Once he arranged a sort of tread-mill in the bottom of a box, and discovered afterwards, by accident, that it was excellent for "breaking up setting hens," keeping them in such constant motion that they soon lost all tendency to "set."

But his talents were evinced more plainly in the conception of novel contrivances than in their execution. In inventive matters Johnnie hitched his wagon boldly to a star. No sort of mechanical marvel seemed to lie beyond the

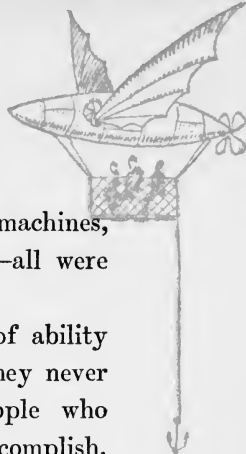
THE BOY INVENTOR

bounds of his imagination. Flying machines, horseless carriages, perpetual motion—all were within the grasp of his mind.

There are lazy, easy-going people of ability who can accomplish things of which they never dream, and there are energetic people who dream of things they can never accomplish. Both classes are apt to be looked upon as geniuses in their way, but it is only the latter that deserves the name. Genius conceives great things; it is only plodding Patience that carries them out.

Johnnie was not content with the mere planning of details. When he had conceived the general idea of an airship, his fancy immediately mounted it and soared away on its tireless wings. Lying on his back out in the orchard, he would look into the sky until he could almost see himself, a tiny speck, drifting gently hither and thither among the clouds.

Yet he did not overlook the importance of less pretentious contrivances, and many were the homely little conveniences he planned. An automatic ax for chopping stove-wood, to be operated by turning a crank, was one of them.



JOHNNIE

This was to be connected with a patent wood-carrier in the form of an endless belt, leading from the wood-yard into the kitchen.

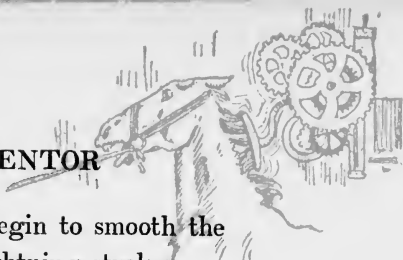
Another was a mechanical milker. It was to be constructed after the manner of a force pump, with a rubber hose extending from stable to cellar. All that would be necessary in order to perform the irksome operation of milking would be to attach one end of the tube to the cow and work the pump-handle. This idea was improved upon from time to time until it became a wonder of ingenuity. The cows might be trained so that they would take their places at the proper time, and a spring might be arranged to clasp the tube to the udders automatically. The power for operating the pump might readily be supplied by a windmill.

Moreover, Johnnie devised a horse-feeder and self-acting groom, which was to be a great labor-saver. To do this part of the chores one would only have to pull a string when the right quantity of hay and oats would fall into the manger with a click, while huge curry-combs, protruding from each side of the stall and im-





THE BOY INVENTOR



pelled by clockwork, would begin to smooth the horse's mane and tail with lightning strokes.

Closely akin to Johnnie's inventive talent was an inborn fondness for experiments. These, like his mechanical constructions, were often carried on in utter aimlessness. He seemed to have a passion for disassembling and re-assembling things.

In infancy this tendency had been rudimentarily apparent in the destruction of rag dolls, and the putting together of dust and water in the form of mud pies. As he grew older it assumed more definite and even dangerous forms.

One phenomenon which he never tired of investigating was the explosive nature of gunpowder, and he had several narrow escapes while studying this. Earth, air, fire, and water were all subjects of great interest, and his experiments with them varied in danger according to their possibilities.

By repeated trials he found just the degree of thinness at which ice would break beneath his weight and let him into the creek. He demonstrated by actual experiment how near to the edge of the bank he could walk without falling,



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and discovered the exact point at which he fell. He tested the comparative strength and resistance of various branches of an apple-tree in relation to his weight, and learned which ones broke with him.

He found from how great a height he could jump without hurting himself, how high he could climb in a sapling before he lost his balance, and just how a boy felt with his breath knocked out.

Johnnie acquired a great deal of experience incidental to his investigation of things. For instance, while studying the labyrinthine structure of a hornet's nest he conceived the bitter pang of the insect's sting, and while observing the curious claws of a crawfish he felt their sharpness.

Such incidents are a part of every boy's natural education, and the city-bred youth who misses them misses some of the great underlying principles of life.

The habit of making things and trying things is much more than a mere waste of time or a preventive of mischief. The boy who drives a nail into a board learns to hit it on the head.

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He becomes agile by climbing trees, and cautious by falling from them.

Some boy's grandmother once said, "A burnt child dreads the fire"; and never has anything relating to childhood been more sagely spoken.

From numberless native sources Johnnie drew that wisdom, positive and negative, which goes to make up the sum total of common sense, and the things he learned not to do were as useful and necessary as the things he learned to do.





XX

WHEN HIS MOTHER DIED

THE darkest shadow that ever lies across the path of boyhood is threatening Johnnie. That almost inconceivable, yet inexorable calamity which he has dreaded ever since earth's dearest idols ceased to him to be immortal, is drawing near. From his earliest remembrance there have come to him occasional shadowy, pensive moments, strange, reflex tides of emotion, when he would pause in his play and sigh in half-conscious recognition of a presentiment of this ordeal.

Even to the verge of tears he has sometimes grieved in its anticipation; but he knows now that he has never truly realized it, that his fancy has never been able for an instant to grasp its overwhelming import.

His mother is going to die. For weeks he has been hoping and praying, fearing and weeping; but there is no longer any hope left, no longer

WHEN HIS MOTHER DIED

any efficacy in prayer—nothing but tears remaining to him. It is a plain, pitiless fact, a condition as inevitable, as uncontrollable, as the setting of the sun.

His own mother—that mother who has always been a part of his life, who gave him life, and with whom every circumstance of life, as he traces it backward and outward, is inseparably joined, she is going to be swept out of existence. He wonders what the world will be like after—after—but he can not conceive. It is all black and incomprehensible.

Day after day she lies patiently in the little bedroom, the memory-filled bedroom, which has always been such a delightful place, which henceforth, will be such a holy place—racked with pain, worn with weariness, but never complaining.

Oh, she is a saint already, he thinks, as he tiptoes out of the room; there is so little corruptible to become incorruptible there, surely the kingdom of heaven, which she is so soon to enter, will make little change in her. Is she not—has she not ever been sanctified?

He steals away to his one boyish place of

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refuge, the barn, to meditate. Vainly he tries to picture to himself the glories of that strange, far-off country beyond the skies to which she is going. Those pearly gates and streets of gold, in which he believes so literally,—will his mother care so very much for them, he wonders.

She has never seemed fond of lavish display here. Only one plain gold ring and a cameo brooch—but she could not afford much jewelry. And she will be rich and always happy there, perfectly happy forever.

A perplexing thought arises. She loves him—once, when she went away for a fortnight's visit, she cried; and she cried again when she came home, as she told him how lonely and homesick she had been. She loves him, loves his father, loves home. How, then, can she be perfectly happy up there, so far away? Only by forgetting, he reasons, and surely, she can never quite do that.

Some one is calling him. Oh, perhaps she is dying now, and he rushes wildly to the house. But it is only the minister, not the angel of death, who has come; and he is going to pray with them.

WHEN HIS MOTHER DIED

Johnnie goes in with downcast eyes. There is a funereal air everywhere. Each face is averted and tearful, except the minister's and hers. The preacher's pious countenance is tranquil, and there is a radiant, restful glory in the mother's waxen features, such as he has never seen before, and she smiles like a bride.

She beckons Johnnie to her, and, as the minister kneels beside them, her feeble arms clasp him close against her bosom. Many a time in his tempestuous little life he has cried; but he has never wept such a convulsive, heart-broken flood of anguish before, and never will again. Every pathetic word of the prayer sinks straight into his soul and makes him shudder with grief, with dread, with rebelliousness.

But she is calm, and the gentle stroke of her hand upon his hair soothes him at length and imparts a touch of that sublime peace of hers, "which passeth understanding"; and he goes out more nearly reconciled than ever before.

Death always comes suddenly, no matter how long expected, or how breathlessly awaited. Johnnie's mother passed away, at last, with a swiftness that was paralyzing. But Providence

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has set a limitation to human sorrow, and Johnnie had reached this in anticipation; and now everything took place, as in a familiar, oft-repeated dream.

Like an unreal rehearsal the funeral ceremony proceeded. He knew just how the minister would look and what he would say; how, at the close, strangers would gather about the bier and the merest friends would wipe their eyes and moan. He knew how the white-gloved, black-frocked pall-bearers would creep softly in to carry the casket away; how the sleek hearse horses would prance and shake their heads; and how the carriages would creak, creak, on their slow march to the cemetery. But the desolate home-coming—he had not imagined that.

When they arrived at home Johnnie slipped away to the woods. Well-meaning neighbors had tried to brighten things about the house, as if in the hope of making him forget his loss, and this grated on him.

But nature was in the same mood as he. A drizzling, all-pervading rain was falling—dripping from leaf to leaf through the autumn fo-



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liage in sad monotonous. There was no living thing in sight, no sound of life to be heard.

Despair seemed traced on every lineament of the forest, and desolation hovered in the air. He had never seen such weather before, and he wondered if the sun would ever have the heart to shine again.

At night, after the rest of the household slept, he crept out again. A harsh wind had risen, before which the clouds had vanished, leaving the sky infinite and clear. Unmindful of the chill blast, he sat down on the doorstep and, resting his chin between his hands, fixed his eyes upon the heavens.

Under such conditions, the stars shed an indescribably desolate influence earthward. The very spirit of their stillness and solitude seems to descend, until the whole shadowy universe is filled with a loneliness, incomparably vast and oppressive.

How coldly, how pitilessly, those stellar eyes stared down at the poor lonely boy, through the immeasurable, bleak, barren spaces of the night. They were all millions of miles away; and yet,

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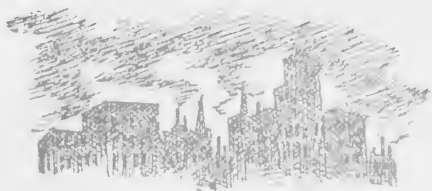
he reflected, his mother must now be still beyond them. And only last night she was here, at home. What a terrible, inconceivable separation!

And yet, as he brooded, he felt that this could not be. God was in heaven, yet He was everywhere. Perhaps, she was also; and, as he continued to meditate, a sense of her immediate presence came over him—a sense which abode in his heart to cheer and, sometimes, to chide him through many years.

Whatever he should do now—whatever he had done, even the little things of which he had been ashamed to tell her, she would know. Her invisible shade would follow him through life, rejoicing in his achievements, sorrowing in his failures, watching over him faithfully all the while.

Perhaps, this childish conceit of Johnnie's was not orthodox. Perhaps, it was unscriptural and inconsistent; yet it was a blessing to the motherless boy and, perhaps, after all,

Human hopes and human creeds
Find their root in human needs.



XXI

THE FLEDGLING'S FLIGHT

THE smoky arms of the distant city had never ceased to beckon to Johnnie. Sometimes for months together he had forgotten it, and sometimes, knowing he could not obey its summons, he had refused to look in its direction; but, whenever he turned his eyes toward the eastern horizon, the vapory signal was always there.

Neither had his old resolve to go to the city some day and become a part of its life ever died entirely away; and now, in his eighteenth year, with the loosening of home ties, with the chastening of his thoughts by sorrow, and the slower, steadier beating of his heart, this intention had become firmer and more active.

It was not altogether that mystic centripetal attraction, which every city exerts upon every boy, that drew him; nor was he influenced merely by a weariness of rural quiet and a roving desire for change. These were considerations, to

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be sure, but beyond them was a growing conviction that the city offered better advantages and greater returns for labor than the country.

Well-fed students of economics are in the habit of decrying the townward tendency of country boys. Urban editors of agricultural journals are constantly advising them to stay on the farm, pointing to the illustrious men of our history who started as farmers. But Johnnie and his father and Eph, discussing the matter in their simplicity around the homely hearth, arrived at another decision. And their observations evinced a certain quaint logic.

They looked at the subject with the narrow view of the individual struggling for selfish ends. In many generations of the Winkle family the farmer's boasted independence had been taught by father to son, until it had come to be regarded as a sacred tenet, to question which were profane.

Yet, as the matter of Johnnie's future career was discussed night after night, one or another of them brought forward facts which seemed to weaken the time-honored phrase's force.

The fertility of the old farm was slowly be-





THE FLEDGLING'S FLIGHT

ing carried to the city year by year, while a lugubrious mortgage hovered above it like a vulture on tireless wings.

The farmer, while never out of work, went oftentimes unpaid. He was dependent, first, upon the weather for a crop; upon the uncertain law of supply and demand, together with "them tricky board o' trade fellers" for his price; and upon the Lord for health and strength.

The city fellow—as far as they could see—set the price at which farm produce was sold, and the price at which groceries and clothing were bought. And, after all, it was pointed out that few farmer boys who had become presidents had attained greatness in their rustic guise. Most of them had abandoned agriculture long before fame found them.

With these and similar arguments, puerile and fallacious no doubt, but weighty to their minds, the Winkles, in convention assembled, proceeded; and the conclusion of it all was that Johnnie should go to the city.

Perhaps, if the other side of the subject could have been comprehended by them, if they



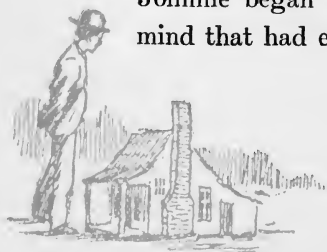
JOHNNIE

could have realized the narrowness of the city's streets and the murkiness of its atmosphere, contrasting these with the freedom and purity of their pastoral environment, they might have decided otherwise; but they were as ignorant of the disadvantages of the metropolis as are its philosophers of the faults of the country.

The final decision of the matter was of great moment to Johnnie, and his prospective journey out into the world filled his every dream. Once more his relationship toward all familiar external things seemed completely changed. In his exaltation and self-importance, the giants of other days dwindled, and many domestic idols seemed to crumble into dust.

Native fields and woodlands took on a plainer aspect. The graceful undulations of the landscape grew angular and flat, the old house appeared weather-beaten and squatty, and even Eph—faithful Eph, the infallible oracle of his childhood—became a man who used very bad language and wore shabby clothes.

Yet, as the day of his departure drew near, Johnnie began to realize that it was only his mind that had exalted itself above these homely



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associations, and that his heart was secretly clinging the closer now to its old friends. After all he had taken root in this lowly soil, and the most cherished ambition to be transplanted could not overcome regret at leaving.

During the last days of his stay at home, Johnnie struggled with conflicting emotions. He went among the horses and cows, calling them fondly by name and feeding them extra nubbins of corn. He slipped over the hill to where the brook, his cheerful little playmate, that got no older, nor more sedate with years, was idling its time away, and, sitting beside it, tossed chips into it and wondered if it would still run on the same when he was gone. It seemed impossible to imagine it down there in the quiet glen alone, singing those lullabies of old, and threading its way in and out among the calamus stalks, and himself so far away.

Into the temple of the woods he took his way, and, in the calm of sylvan solitude, prayerfully recounted the joys and hopes, the regrets and fears of his simple life, as a monk numbers his beads.

When youth is constrained to look backward,

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the vanishing point of its perspective appears as distant as that of age. Its years are fewer, but they seem very long.

At last the eventful morning came. Johnnie rose early and went out to help with the chores, just as he had done when only an ordinary farmer boy. He had resolved to adopt no lofty airs toward Eph and the stock on this last morning, even if he was almost a city gentleman. He would pass among them carelessly, familiarly, as of yore, with no allusion in word or manner to his approaching promotion.

He had decided to do this partly out of regard for their sensitive feelings, more, perhaps, out of regard for his own.

But Eph had forestalled him, and the milk was already cooling on the shelves in the pantry.

"I 'lowed I'd as well git my hand in," Eph explained dryly, when questioned.

Somewhat resentful of this bald and unsentimental bluntness, Johnnie betook himself to the haymow to indulge in one more hour of solemn meditation. Uppermost in his thoughts now was a strain of pity—largely uncalled for and wasted—for his father and Eph and all the



THE FLEDGLING'S FLIGHT

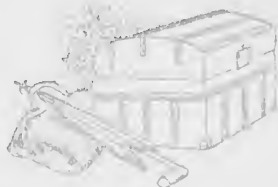
friends and relatives he was leaving behind. How terribly they would miss him—how yearningly they would think of him, and how eagerly they would await his distant return.

It would be a weary time to them—though short and satisfactory to himself—before he came home again. Five years! He would not think of returning to visit them under that time, and possibly not for ten.

Tears suffused his eyes as he thought of his poor old father and Eph, sitting alone before the fire in the desolate winter evenings.

Perhaps these morbid musings were extravagant and egotistical to a degree. But they were sorrowfully real; and what boy is not a gentle egotist?

At ten o'clock the wagon was driven up to the house, and Johnnie's tin-bound trunk was silently loaded in. Then Aunt Mary, who had come "to pack him off," brought out two boxes of lunch, a bag of apples, a bundle, and a faded umbrella, all of which she grouped about the trunk; and then came Johnnie himself, in linen shirt and new clothes full of store creases.

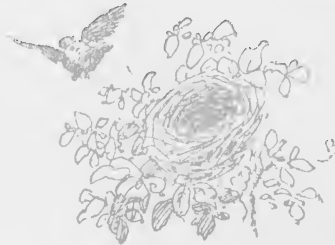


JOHNNIE

As he came down the walk Pluto sprang from behind a clump of bushes, and, barking a merry challenge, jumped upon his boyish master, with a view to provoking a frolic. Poor Pluto was ignorant of the pathos of the occasion. Johnnie's lips trembled as he looked down into the dog's laughing eyes. Parting from that ever faithful friend was not the lightest of his farewells.

"Well, sonny, be good to yourself," called Eph carelessly, as the wagon started. Aunt Mary smiled a cheery good by and then threw her apron over her face, while Mr. Winkle, on the seat at Johnnie's side, clucked to the horses so vigorously that they almost broke into a run.

And Johnnie Winkle, the little boy of endless dreams and schemes, had flown from the downy home nest, never to abide in it again.





XXII

IN A GREAT CITY

THE train, after groping its way with many stops and starts among endless groups of cottages, of flaming factories and dingy vacant lots, ran straight into a huge, dark building at last, and came to a standstill. The brakeman called the name of the great city familiarly—on what intimate terms with it he seemed to be!—and Johnnie, with his burden of baggage, crept out of the stuffy car into the seething, smoky pandemonium of the Grand Union Station.

In a trance he passed through the iron gate with the crowd, and, after drifting about in various eddies, presently found himself in an anteroom, where an obliging young man took charge of his bundles.

He had been admonished to take a cab directly to Uncle Andrew's, but it occurred to him that he might as well see the city independently first.

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For a time the vast magnificence of the metropolis appalled him; but, within an hour, the reaction came, and he proudly felt himself to be an integral part of the busy, alert life about him. Almost unconsciously he abandoned the shambling, leisurely gait of rusticity, and began to step forward with the erect, nervous manner of the urban.

Thus he traversed street after street with no care for time, and no particular idea as to whither he was going, save that he was journeying from the old past into the novel and hopeful future. His immediate plans were indefinite, but he had a firm faith in ultimate success of some sort.

As the day wore on he began to deliberate. He could not make up his mind just what vocation to adopt here in the promising city. This vexing question had been left unsettled when he came away, with the understanding that he should consult wise Uncle Andrew, and then write home before accepting any position.

Johnnie had brought with him wondrous letters of recommendation and certificates of char-

IN A GREAT CITY

acter, signed by the pastor and Squire Jetters, which, he doubted not, had magic power to unlock any gilded door ; but it perplexed him to decide just where to apply.

It would be very awkward and unfortunate, he thought, after he had won his way to the presidency of some great railway system, for instance, to find that its duties were irksome and uncongenial.

Toward evening he returned to the station for his baggage, and was much incensed when the accommodating young man, who had volunteered to care for it, demanded pay. Here, he thought, he had fallen into the clutches of one of "them there pesky sharpers," that Eph had cautioned him against. This experience caused him to ask several cab drivers their price and bargain with them shrewdly before engaging one to drive him to Uncle Andrew's.

After a fortnight's weary search for an opening, Johnnie accepted the position of clerk in Uncle Andrew's grocery store. It was not an ideal situation—not just what he had expected to obtain—but it was better than nothing.

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Uncle Andrew seemed to be the only business man in all the great city upon whom the gilt-edge recommendations made any impression.

Johnnie became a very good clerk in time, learning to concern himself not so much with whether the position exactly suited him as with whether he suited the position.

As the seasons went by a double metamorphosis worked upon him. Nature was silently engaged in transforming the youth into the young man, while art busied herself more ostentatiously in making a city man out of the callow country boy.

Both nature and art succeeded in a degree. He grew taller and the downy rudiments of a mustache appeared on his lip; his voice registered lower, and his hands and feet attained their due proportions. Likewise he became dressy and adopted an habitually suave smile. In contact with customers he developed into a Chesterfield of courtesy.

Nor did art stop at this. She led him into theaters and concert halls; put cigarettes into his mouth, and parted his hair in the middle; even impelled him to mutilate the good old fam-



IN A GREAT CITY

ily name, and subscribe himself "John Wynkle" when writing home.

In short, art inveigled Johnnie into all sorts of dangerous places and all manner of ridiculous habits, and, but for nature's persistent care, might have ruined him beyond redemption.

But toward the second spring he tired of this artificial life. The fever of fast living cooled somewhat, and, as his mind grew clear, his thoughts returned to his erstwhile, forgotten country home. He retired earlier each evening, and rose at daybreak every morning to take long, solitary walks in the park.

It was April, according to the calendar, but the season's tokens that greeted his eyes were few and feeble. Where were all the thrushes and meadow-larks and whippoorwills, he wondered, and the wild flowers and the tree-toads and frogs? How he longed to hear a genuine frog concert again, such as used to pervade the April twilight at home.

Whenever he closed his eyes, little pictures seemed to pass before him—visions of old familiar scenes down on the farm. Sometimes

A decorative floral illustration on the left margin, featuring a cluster of leaves and small flowers, with a few butterflies fluttering above it.

JOHNNIE

there would appear a certain cozy corner of the orchard. Every leaf of every tree seemed to stand out boldly against the blue of the sky, and the minutest details—the bees that hummed in and out amid the foliage, the tiny ants and bugs that crept through the dew-wet grass—all were revealed to him with life-like distinctness.

The apple-trees budded and blossomed, scenting the air with an almost palpable perfume; little green apples came out and hung above him, and cherries grew crimson just beyond his reach. Blooms that could not be gathered, fruit that could not be plucked!

Now and then he would fancy himself in the heart of the old forest again, the cool, quiet, dimly-green depths, where life was as calm, as vague and unvexed as at the bottom of the sea. The winds that threw the tree-tops into verdant billows never disturbed the dark under-world beneath, and the light of the warmest sun became emerald-tinted and liquid-cool ere it reached the ground.

Shadowy, dreamy sweet was the recollection of these rustic retreats to Johnnie now, and their peace and tranquillity, which he had once

IN A GREAT CITY

deprecatèd, seemed the most blessed thing in all the world. Even thoughts of the corn-field were not altogether unpleasant. Compared to the drudgery of selling groceries the labor of farming seemed an absolute diversion.

The simple truth was that Johnnie had grown helplessly, miserably homesick.

Uncle Andrew soon observed the air of abstraction with which Johnnie dragged through his duties, and was not slow to guess its cause. Like Johnnie he had come to the city many years before, and had suffered the distressing pangs which afflict every such prodigal more or less, and he knew their sovereign remedy.

Homesickness, of all diseases, is preëminently quickest cured by suitable change of scenery.

One evening as Johnnie stood in the door, gazing vacantly down the street, Uncle Andrew spoke.

"John," he asked, "don't you think this close confinement is injuring your health a little?"

Johnnie immediately improvised a deep, sonorous cough, and answered huskily:

"Well, since you mention it, uncle, I fear it is."



JOHNNIE

"And don't you believe a few weeks' outing would help you?"

"I'm sure, at least, I rather think it would," Johnnie replied, trying to restrain his eagerness.

"I've a notion to send you up north a while," Uncle Andrew proceeded. Johnnie's spirits fell.

"Or out west." There was a pause.

"Or I might let you go out to your father's, if you think that would answer," he concluded with deliberation.

Johnnie thought it would. There was a spring on his father's place whose waters were distinctly medicinal. The air was remarkably pure, and there was a great deal of sunshine out that way, too. He was sure he would regain his health there.

Early the next morning Johnnie wended his way to the station. It lacked two hours until train time, but he hurried breathlessly all the way. He was simply in a hurrying mood.



XXIII

A MISFIT

HENCEFORTH he must be known as John. It would be improper, disrespectful, almost abusive to speak of the fine young gentleman from the city as Johnnie, who appeared at the Winkle place one day nearly two years after Johnnie went away.

Mr. Winkle and Eph were fanning themselves on the front porch while the leisurely new housekeeper prepared dinner, when they noticed a well-dressed stranger approaching. In one hand he carried a slender cane, in the other a valise.

"Books er lightnin' rods," observed Eph, "er, mebbe, jew'lry." Pluto, who had been lying lazily in the shade, suddenly jumped to his feet, sniffed the air, and bounded off to meet the newcomer.

"Better git! That there dawg lives on peddlers!" shouted Eph, while Mr. Winkle tried

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to call Pluto back. But Pluto, instead of attacking the stranger, welcomed him by such mad waggings of the tail as he had not indulged in for months.

Then Eph, whose instinct was only inferior to the dog's in acuteness, gave a sudden whoop, and tossed his hat into the air. Mr. Winkle started to his feet in helpless bewilderment. "Well, durn my cats!" cried Eph, "if that ain't sonny."

A moment later there was a general hearty handshaking, followed by an awkward pause. Then ensued a forced and desultory exchange of those commonplace questions supposed to put people at their ease. It was comical and it was pathetic to hear father and son ask: "How's your health?" and, "How's your Uncle Andy?" and, "Are Aunt Mary's folks well?" and then go on to comment on the weather.

It must be remembered that John's sojourn in the city had almost completely covered the wonderful chrysalis period. He had crept away to the city a caterpillar and had flown back a butterfly.

To his father, who had thought of him all





A MISFIT

the while as Johnnie, it was no light shock to have him return unexpectedly as John.

Dinner served to dissipate this painful company air somewhat, and during the afternoon father and son grew quickly acquainted once more; yet a new respect for each other, not altogether unpleasant, persisted.

Next morning at dawn John was up. He put on his old clothes again, although they seemed much shrunken, and discarded shoes entirely. He went joyfully out to the barn to renew old friendships. But the stock greeted him coldly. Stooping at old Brindle's side, he bored his head into her flank and proceeded to milk her; he had barely begun when she kicked him over heartlessly. The horses shied at him; and the chickens fled at his approach.

One after another he visited all the old spots of which he had dreamed so fondly. Everything was just the same; nothing had changed. He affirmed this over and over to himself. Yet nothing seemed to affect him as he had expected it to do—as it used to do. He looked across the purple meadow, up into the trees, and listened to the thrush's familiar song—listened

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and lingered in vain for his heart to wake and respond as of yore. But the old glamour was gone.

At last he gave up, and went slowly back to the house in disappointment.

John Winkle—let us say Johnnie just once more—Johnnie Winkle had become a man; and only in vaguest dreams would the pristine gladness of the springtime ever thrill his heart again.

Paradise lay behind him. Yet one supreme compensation still remained. Like the first boy who became a man, he was destined to depart from the Garden of Eden not alone, but hand in hand with a woman.

“Say, son,” remarked Eph confidentially that evening—even he had dropped the diminutive form, and no longer said “sonny”—“say, son, recollect the time ye paid a visit to ol’ Missus Meadows?”

John had forgotten.

“But how did you know about it, Eph?” he asked.

“Law, I allus know’d lots more’n I let on,” said Eph. “Ye didn’t know I follered ye all

A MISFIT

the way thar an' back, but I did—I did so. An' I know'd it wuzn't the ol' lady ye went to see."

John smiled. He would have been exasperated if he had known this at the time; but now it only amused him.

"Well, what d'ye think?" Eph continued, "that there same young lady—her name wuz Mary Bell, wuzn't it? Well, sir; she's visitin' down to Tuckers' now."

John smiled superiorly again.

"Well, what of it?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothin'; nothin' at all, only she asked me if you recollected her. I just thought I'd ought to mention it."

This information, so quaintly imparted, had little apparent effect upon John. But it was on his mind when he fell asleep that night. Visions of Mabel—the angelic little Mabel of old—mingled with his dreams and woke him in the morning.

When he went into the woods that day a shadow of the child sweetheart seemed to cling at his side. He tried not to notice it; struggled to throw it off, and attempted to lose it by

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strolling through unfamiliar parts of the forest. But it would not be abandoned, and at last it led him irresistibly to the very nook where he and the girl had loitered together so long ago.

He examined the spot curiously, half scornfully, but not without a shade of regret. They were mere foolish children together—he and Mabel—yet they were happy children, and he wished he could enjoy some things now as he did then.

He recalled how he had once carved their initials upon a certain tree near by, and, seeking it out, found the letters still there.

At first they seemed to laugh at him as they met his eyes, and yet, as he continued to look, seemed to weep and grow faint and blurred.

As he returned to the house the shadow still clung at his side; clung more firmly, more fondly than ever, and he no longer strove to shake it off.

There was a friendly meeting between John and Mabel a few days later. Each thought the other had changed greatly; and each secretly decided that the change was for the better. John was surprised to learn that Mabel

A MISFIT

had been a resident of a city suburb for years, and that during his stay in the city he had been separated from her by only a few miles.

This knowledge rather vexed him when he thought of all the pleasant hours they might have spent together throughout the recent winters; but when he thought of the times to come, after they should both return to the city, he did not mind. For he intended to go back soon again. The country had become as great a misfit for him as his old clothes.

In truth, having once been forsaken by him, it had now finally disowned him forever.

When once more the afternoon train labored into the Grand Union Station with John as one of its passengers, he showed little evidence of excitement or awe. He had not gazed out of the window much during the journey. His time had been, and was still, thoroughly occupied with looking after his traveling companion. He escorted her through the crowd, and at the door of the station handed her into a cab with the assurance that he would call on her very soon.

Some knowing people, whose gaze was at-

JOHNNIE

tracted by them, thought they were brother and sister; and other more knowing people thought they were not.





XXIV

THE MIRACLE OF MARRIAGE

IT was four years later, and John had ceased to be Johnnie so long ago and had become such a busy man that he seldom recalled the other life down on the old farm. He was a partner in the grocery business now, and a full-fledged and important citizen. He had cast his first vote, and paid taxes, and joined a club. Moreover he had been spoken of as a possible candidate for the city council, thereby having been cajoled into subscribing liberally to the campaign fund. And what further evidence of manhood and respected citizenship could be required?

Yet a new dignity was soon to be assumed by him—one before which all others sank into insignificance. He was about to be married. That was why, although a good citizen and a safe and sound young man, he was known to be at present visionary, flighty, and totally irre-



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sponsible; that was why, as he sat at his desk, he chewed the end of his penholder into splinters, spilled ink everywhere, and tore up sheet after sheet of paper in an attempt to write a suitable and intelligible letter to his father.

The strange accidents that befell John at this period—the mistakes he made and the ridiculous antics he cut—were innumerable. Indeed, the mental status of a young man in this predicament can never be successfully exploited. That it borders upon paranoëa, dementia, and melancholia at times can not be doubted.

Hysteria—if men could have hysteria—might be an approximate diagnosis. Such persons do a great many unaccountable things, and develop peculiar traits. Perhaps the deed itself is often unaccountable. But the dreams devolving upon it—they are divine! And if these young men exhibit odd and contradictory phases of mind, possibly it is because the mind is for the time in complete abeyance to the heart, because mentality has given way to sentiment. Even in these days men are wont to resign themselves to dreams of love, just as if such delu-

THE MIRACLE OF MARRIAGE

sions had not been tried by countless cynics and found vaporous and evanescent.

But John Winkle's love was different from the kind heretofore known upon earth. It was deeper and higher and stronger and more eternal. He knew it, and Mabel knew it; what matter if the cynics did not?

Their courtship had been personally conducted throughout. They had not met in a ball-room; had not made love behind screens of hot-house plants to the sound of waltz music while chaperons hovered near with fiercely ruffled feathers, like brooding hens.

Night after night Mrs. Meadows had surrendered her modest parlor to them and kept herself discreetly out of sight. She could trust John Winkle, she told her neighbors; if she could not she would not have permitted her daughter to see him at all.

Certainly John and Mabel had become thoroughly acquainted, and perhaps their love was different from the passion of some of their aristocratic neighbors.

Every twilight, now, John passed in Mabel's

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presence. Almost every morning he ran to tell her something or to ask her something he had forgotten the night before. Often they spent hours together at the window in silence, watching the dusk turn to darkness—watching the stars as they took their unalterable positions in the sky; and life and love took on new and mysterious meanings as they watched.

Sometimes they conversed upon the most unromantic subjects. Perhaps Mabel would ask her lover solicitously whether he was fond of waffles, or if he liked pancakes. Nor was this a procedure to be laughed at, for of such trifles is the kingdom of domestic bliss.

The wedding day came at last, and with it, bright and early, the three best friends of little Johnnie Winkle of old,—his father, Aunt Mary, and Eph. They came with the scent of rustic roses upon them, with the manners and dress of rural life,—unchanged by fashion, altered but little by time. Into the grocery they filed with hearty laugh and handshake, each bearing a mysterious parcel, for which Aunt Mary accounted by shrilly whispering, “Wedding presents!”

THE MIRACLE OF MARRIAGE

At any other time John might have been embarrassed by their unexpected appearance, but now he was only pleased and a trifle scared.

All took dinner with him at Uncle Andrew's. Aunt Mary contributed sundry eatables, fresh from the farm, for the occasion, which she had remembered as favorites of Johnnie's.

And what an array of bygone incidents of John's early life was called up and reviewed over the plates!

Each visitor had brought along some particular anecdote concerning Johnnie. First his father told of Johnnie's early passion for "projecks," recounting several of his disastrous experiments.

Then Aunt Mary leaned back in her chair and gave an entertaining account of how Johnnie had once played circus performer for the delectation of the minister.

"We were all settin' there," she said; "an' the preacher arguin' with his ma about goin' to shows, which she was upholdin', an' had the best of it, too, when, lo an' behold, here came Johnnie—an' you ought to have seen him! Without a stitch on to mention,"—here she put

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her handkerchief to her face and shook with suppressed laughter. "Goodness, he was a sight!—an' there he was a-turnin' somersets—an' there we all were, an' his poor ma scandalized speechless!"



Next Eph, who had been non-committal and rather ill at ease heretofore, began to giggle, and, holding his knife aloft to command attention, introduced his choicest tale. He related how he had known all along that "sonny wuz tuck with the Meadows' girl"; how he had followed the boy on his first visit to Meadows'; and had peeped in at the window "unbeknownst, an' seen the ol' lady entertainin' him 'stid o' Mary Bell."

Then they all laughed heartily again, John heartiest of all.

The wedding ceremony passed, as do they all. The assemblage in the Meadows' parlor chatted and laughed gaily, until some one whispered, "Here they come!" Then there was a flutter, a hush, a gentle prayer, a few brief words, a blessing—sobs here and there, and a painful silence.

The minister broke the spell soon with jolly

THE MIRACLE OF MARRIAGE

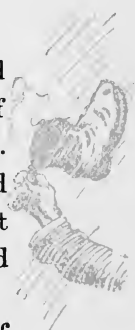
congratulations, and then Mrs. Meadows and Aunt Mary, wiping their eyes and laughing, pressed forward.

The good old country custom of kissing the bride was inaugurated, and Eph was one of the first to take advantage of it. The room buzzed with the conventional comments: "How lovely she looked!" and, "Did you notice how he trembled, poor fellow!"

A lavish dinner (which Aunt Mary insisted on calling supper) was served, in the course of which somebody addressed the bride as Mrs. Winkle, and she pretended not to hear; and everybody laughed at the incident just as if it had not occurred at all the weddings they had ever attended.

Neither bride nor groom partook heartily of the dinner. The ethereal atmosphere surrounding them rendered the veriest angel food coarse and common. Moreover, John in particular was still badly frightened. He had gone through it all in a hypnotic state of terror, quaking with a strange unfounded fear.

It was only after they had departed amid a shower of good bys and rice, and were safely



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started on their tour, that his senses returned, and he began to realize what he had done. And then the pride and tenderness and self-importance and general buoyancy which took possession of him—it was simply intoxicating.

As the train rumbled on, exhausted by the excitement of it all, the girl at his side—his wife!—closed her eyes and leaned her head coyly against his shoulder; and, looking down into her sweet, confiding face, the only regret of John's was that his mother could not have lived to see his wife.





XXV

THE NEW BOY

THERE had been babies before, there would be babies hereafter, but never such a baby as this one. His precocity was established with his first unterrified and highly intelligent glance at the ceiling; his beauty was admitted by all from the beginning; his amazing lustiness and strength were demonstrated by the way he cried and squirmed. There could be no question about it—he was an extraordinary infant.

A great many burning questions did arise about him, however. In the first place, it was a matter of earnest debate as to whom he most resembled.

Every baby, as soon as born, resembles somebody. Sometimes it is its father, sometimes a great grandparent or an uncle or a second cousin, but resemble some one it must. Each acquaintance who called, expressed an opinion upon this vital point—because it was expected.

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There are certain well-known though unwritten laws governing such cases. In viewing a baby for the first time it is one's duty to begin by speaking of its sweetness, then to mention its plumpness, and then to commit one's self as to what or whom it looks like.

Ignorant or careless bachelors have made unforgiving enemies of former friends by neglecting to observe these rules.

Grandma Meadows thought the baby was the very image of its papa. Uncle Andrew held to the opinion that it was the picture of Mabel; while Eph, when he made a pilgrimage from the country, expressly to see it, said it looked "right smart" like his sister when an infant.

Another momentous question related to the exact color of the baby's eyes. Every morning the parents made renewed ocular examinations, and each time discovered a different hue. Then they were greatly perplexed as to whether it would have curls, and what its complexion would be.

They dressed the infant in a weight of flannels that would have exhausted a really sentient being, and John brought it everything pur-





THE NEW BOY

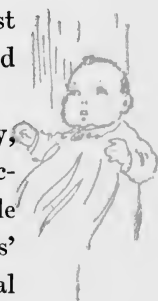
chasable—rattles, rings, and dolls, which he would wave in its face wildly by the hour, trying to teach it to notice things.

In fact, the home life of Mr. and Mrs. John Winkle was given entirely to developing the wonderful child. A daintily bound album was purchased in which to record minutely every step of its onward progress.

This unique book had blank pages for the photographs and signatures of parents and nurse; a space in which to register the baby's weight, color, and condition; numerous places for its pictures at different ages; a blank page for it to walk across in taking its first step; and a memorandum in which to record its first laugh, its first attack of colic, first tooth, and first spasm.

When not engaged in playing with the baby, John and Mabel were usually studying this record or talking about it. Nor was the little tyrant content with monopolizing its parents' attention, but must needs entertain every casual guest that called.

"Did you hear about that awful fire last



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night?" Uncle Andrew would ask, coming in breathlessly.

"No," John would answer with a half-hearted attempt to appear interested. "Where was—look! Did you see that smile? Tootsy wootsy, there, now! Oh, you didn't look quick enough. Let's try him again." And he would contort his features madly and gouge the infant prodigy in the stomach, with the fond hope of eliciting another rare and wonderful "goo-goo."

And the fire and all the unimportant, tiresome world outside were forgotten, were renounced, and tossed scornfully aside in favor of the one thing worth while in the whole universe—the bouncing, new boy.

Ever with the tenderest solicitude the anxious parents watched over the little cherub, waking or sleeping. How the mother's heart palpitated if it happened to sneeze. How the father faltered if it chanced to cough. How unhappy were they both when it cried!

Its slightest indisposition filled them with wild alarm. Once the doctor was called in the

THE NEW BOY

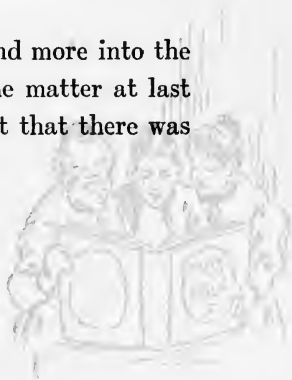
middle of the night because the baby did not breathe right.

It was, indeed, the most precious possession that earthly life may know, the brightest jewel ever given into human keeping; and so was John once, and Mabel, and humble Eph; and so are all.

One important matter, intimately connected with the new boy, remained a subject of dispute for months. This was his name. He had come into the world incognito, and there seemed to be no name anywhere that suited him. The back of the dictionary was searched through, the Bible was exhausted, and the long roll of relatives, living and dead, was called to no avail.

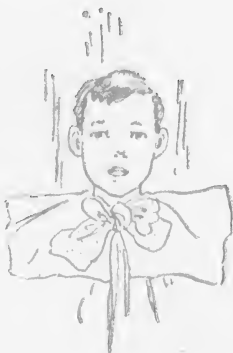
Grandma insisted on an unusual name, papa wanted something common, and the mother longed to call him something musical and sweet. A combination of all these qualities could not be found.

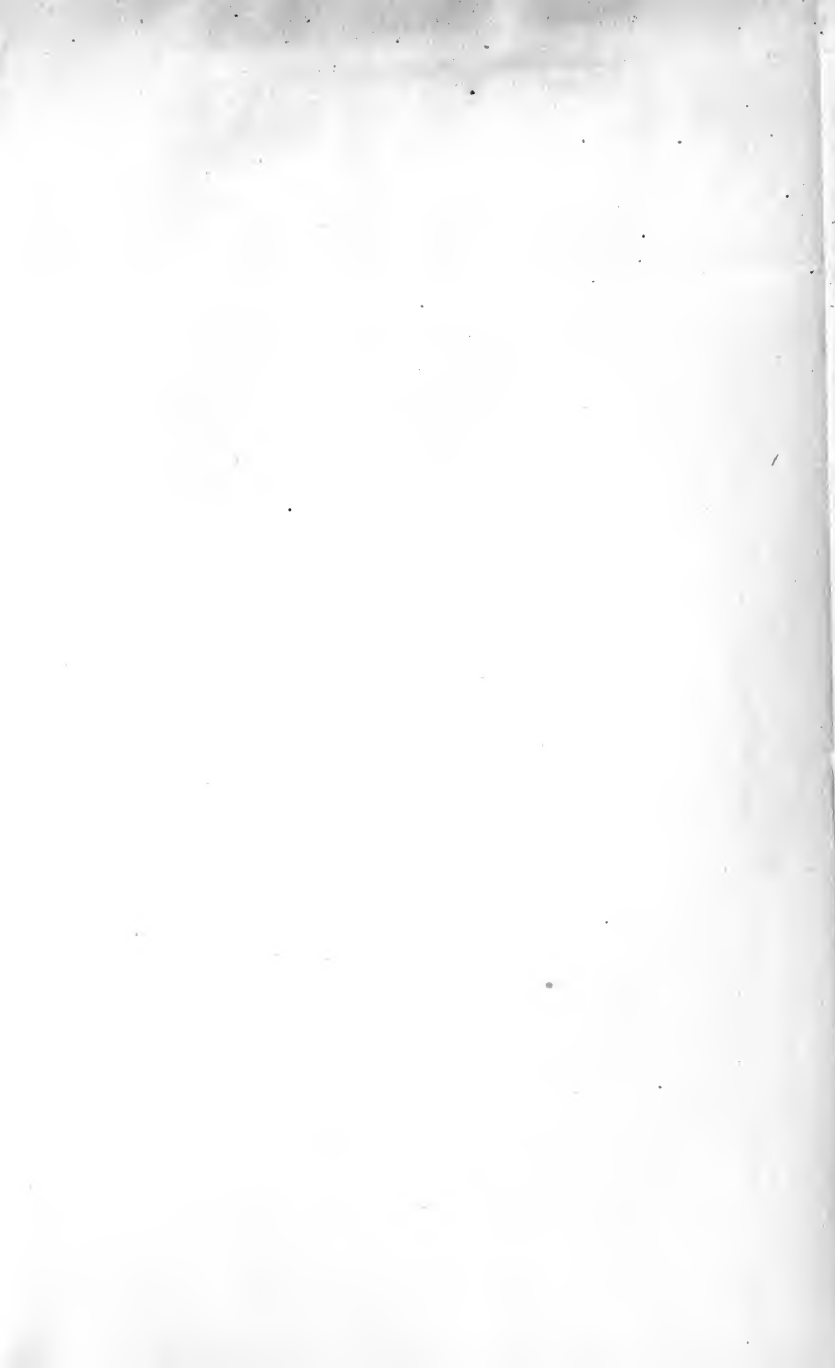
But as the baby grew more and more into the semblance of a real, live boy, the matter at last settled itself. It became evident that there was



JOHNNIE

one name—and only one—that would sit properly upon a boy with such merry blue eyes, such a saucily puckered mouth, and a countenance so quaintly quizzical, so mischievous, so innocent and bland. Looking upon this complexity of features, they could only call him JOHNNIE.





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